

The Ball of Fire

George Randolph
Chester and
Lillian Chester

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For an instant the brown eyes and the blue ones met

The Ball of Fire

By
George Randolph Chester
and
Lillian Chester



Illustrated

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CHAPTER I

NO PLACE FOR SENTIMENT

SILENCE pervaded the dim old aisles of Market Square Church; a silence which seemed to be palpable; a solemn hush which wavered, like the ghostly echoes of anthems long forgotten, among the slender columns and the high arches and the delicate tracery of the groining; the winter sun, streaming through the clerestory windows, cast, on the floor and on the vacant benches, patches of ruby and of sapphire, of emerald and of topaz, these seeming only to accentuate the dimness and the silence.

A thin, wavering, treble note, so delicate that it seemed like a mere invisible cobweb of a tone, stole out of the organ loft and went pulsing up amid the dim arches. It grew in volume; it added a diapason; a deep, soft bass joined it, and then, subdued, but throbbing with the passion of a lost soul, it swelled into one of the noble preludes of Bach. The organ rose in a mighty crescendo to a peal which shook the very edifice; then it stopped with an abruptness which was uncanny, so much so that the silence which ensued was oppressive. In that silence the vestry door creaked, it opened wide, and it was as if a vision had suddenly been set there! Framed in the dark doorway against

the background of the sun-flooded vestry, bathed in the golden light from the transept window, brown-haired, brown-eyed, rosy-cheeked, stood a girl who might have been one of the slender stained-glass virgins come to life, the golden light flaming the edges of her hair into an oriole. She stood timidly, peering into the dimness, and on her beautifully curved lips was a half questioning smile.

"Uncle Jim," she called, and there was some quality in her low voice which was strangely attractive; and disturbing.

"By George, Gail, I forgot that you were to come for me!" said Jim Sargent, rising from amid the group of men in the dim transept. "The decorators drove us out of the vestry."

"They drove me out, too," laughed the vision, stepping from her frame.

"We are delighted that they drove you in here," quoth the tall, young Reverend Smith Boyd, who had accomplished the rare art of bowing gracefully in a Prince Albert.

She smiled her acknowledgment of the compliment, and glanced uncertainly at the awe-inspiring vestry meeting, then she turned toward the door.

"My niece, Miss Gail Sargent, gentlemen," announced Jim Sargent, with entirely justifiable pride, and, beaming until his bald spot seemed to glow with an added shine, he introduced her to each of the gentlemen present, with the exception of Smith Boyd, whom she had met that morning.

"What a pity Saint Paul didn't see you," remarked silver-bearded Rufus Manning, calmly appropriating the vision and ushering her into the pew between himself and her uncle. "He never would have said it."

"That women should not sit in council with the men?" she laughed, looking into the blue eyes of patriarchal Manning. "Are you sure I won't be in the way?"

"Not at all," round-headed old Nicholas Van Ploon immediately assured her. He had popped his eyes open with a jerk at the entrance of Gail, and had not since been able to close them to their normal almond shape. He sat now uncomfortably twisted so that he could face her, and his cheeks were reddening with the exertion, which had wrinkled his roundly filled vest. The young rector contemplated her gravely. He was not quite pleased.

"We'll be through in a few minutes, Gail," promised Jim Sargent. "Allison, you were about to prove something to us, I think," and he leaned forward to smile across Gail at Rufus Manning.

"Prove is the right word," agreed the stockily built man who had evidently been addressing the vestry. He was acutely conscious of the presence of Gail, as they all were. "Your rector suggests that this is a matter of sentiment. You are anxious to have fifty million dollars to begin the erection of a cathedral; but I came here to talk business, and that only. Granting you the full normal appreciation of your Vedder Court property, and the normal increase of your aggregate rentals, you can not have, at the end of ten years, a penny over forty-two millions. I am prepared to offer you, in cash, a sum which will, at three and a half per cent., and in ten years, produce that exact amount. To this I add two million."

"How much did you allow for increase in the value of the property?" asked Nicholas Van Ploon, whose only knowledge for several generations had been cen-

tred on this one question. The original Van Ploon had bought a vast tract of Manhattan for a dollar an acre, and, by that stroke of towering genius, had placed the family of Van Ploon, for all eternity, beyond the necessity of thought.

For answer, Allison passed him the envelope upon which he had been figuring, checking off an item as he did so. He noticed that Gail's lips twitched with suppressed mirth. She turned abruptly to look back at the striking transept window, and the three vestrymen in the rear pew immediately sat straighter. Willis Cunningham, who was a bachelor, hastily smoothed his Vandyke. He was so rich, by inheritance, that money meant nothing to him.

"Not enough," grunted Van Ploon, handing back the envelope, and twisting again in the general direction of Gail.

"Ample," retorted Allison. "You can't count anything for the buildings. While I don't deny that they yield the richest income of any property in the city, they are the most decrepit tenements in New York. They'll fall down in less than ten years. You have them propped up now."

Jim Sargent glanced solicitously at Gail, but she did not seem to be bored; not a particle!

"They are passed by the building inspector annually," pompously stated W. T. Chisholm, his mutton chops turning pink from the reddening of the skin beneath. He had spent a lifetime in resenting indignities before they reached him.

"Building inspectors change," insinuated Allison. "Politics is very uncertain."

Four indignant vestrymen jerked forward to answer that insult.

"Gentlemen, this is a vestry meeting," sternly reproved the Reverend Smith Boyd, advancing a step, and seeming to feel the need of a gavel. His rich, deep barytone explained why he was rector of the richest church in the world.

Gail's eyes were dancing, but otherwise she was demureness itself as she studied, in turns, the members of the richest vestry in the world. She estimated that eight of the gentlemen then present were almost close enough to the anger line to swear. They numbered just eight, and they were most interesting! And *this* was a vestry meeting!

"The topic of debate was money, I believe," suggested Manning, rescuing his sense of humour from somewhere in his beard. He was the infidel member. "Suppose we return to it. Is Allison's offer worth considering?"

"Why?" inquired the nasal voice of clean-shaven old Joseph G. Clark, who was sarcastic in money matters. The Standard Cereal Company had attained its colossal dimensions through rebates; and he had invented the device! "The only reason we'd sell to Allison would be that we could get more money than by the normal return from our investment."

The thinly spun treble note began once more, pulsing its timid way among the high, dim arches, as if seeking a lodgment where it might fasten its tiny thread of harmony, and grow into a masterful composition. A little old lady came slowly down the centre aisle of the nave, in rich but modest black, struggling, against her infirmities, to walk with a trace of the erect gracefulness of her bygone youth. Gail, listening raptly to the delicately increasing throb of the music, followed, in abstraction, the slow progress of the little old lady, who

seemed to carry with her, for just a moment, a trace of the solemn hush belonging to that perspective of slender columns which spread their gracefully pointed arches up into the groined twilight, where the music hovered until it could gather strength to burst into full song. The little old lady turned her gaze for an instant to the group in the transept, and subconsciously gave the folds of her veil a touch; then she slipped into her pew, down near the altar, and raised her eyes to the exquisite Henri Dupres crucifix. She knelt, and bowed her forehead on her hands.

"I've allowed two million for the profit of Market Square Church in dealing with me," stated Allison, again proffering the envelope which no one made a move to take. "I will not pay a dollar more."

W. T. Chisholm was suddenly reminded that the vestry had a moral obligation in the matter under discussion. He was president of the Majestic Trust Company, and never forgot that fact.

"To what use would you devote the property of Market Square Church?" he gravely asked.

"The erection of a terminal station for all the municipal transportation in New York," answered Allison; "subways, elevateds, surface cars, traction lines! The proposition should have the hearty co-operation of every citizen."

Simple little idea, wasn't it? Gail had to think successively to comprehend what a stupendous enterprise this was; and the man talked about it as modestly as if he were planning to sod a lawn; more so! Why, back home, if a man dreamed a dream so vast as that, he just talked about it for the rest of his life; and they put a poet's wreath on his tombstone.

"Now you're talking sentiment," retorted stubby-

moustached Jim Sargent. "You said, a while ago, that you came here strictly on business. So did we. This is no place for sentiment."

Rufus Manning, with the tip of his silvery beard in his fingers, looked up into the delicate groining of the apse, where it curved gracefully forward over the head of the famous Henri Dupres crucifix, and he grinned. Gail Sargent was looking contemplatively from one to the other of the grave vestrymen.

"You're right," conceded Allison curtly. "Suppose you fellows talk it over by yourselves, and let me know your best offer."

"Very well," assented Jim Sargent, with an indifference which did not seem to be assumed. "We have some other matters to discuss, and we may as well thrash this thing out right now. We'll let you know to-morrow."

Gail looked at her watch and rose energetically.

"I shall be late at Lucile's, Uncle Jim. I don't think I can wait for you."

"I'm sorry," regretted Sargent. "I don't like to have you drive around alone."

"I'll be very happy to take Miss Sargent anywhere she'd like to go," offered Allison, almost instantaneously.

"Much obliged, Allison," accepted Sargent heartily; "that is, if she'll go with you."

"Thank you," said Gail simply, as she stepped out of the pew.

The gentlemen of the vestry rose as one man. Old Nicholas Van Ploon even attempted to stand gracefully on one leg, while his vest bulged over the back of the pew in front of him.

"I think we'll have to make you a permanent member

of the vestry," smiled Manning, the patriarch, as he bowed his adieus. "We've been needing a brightening influence for some time."

Willis Cunningham, the thoughtful one, wedged his Vandyke between the heads of Standard Cereal Clark and Banker Chisholm.

"We hope to see you often, Miss Sargent," was his thoughtful remark.

"I mean to attend services," returned Gail graciously, looking up into the organ loft, where the organist was making his third attempt at that baffling run in the Bach prelude.

"You haven't said how you like our famous old church," suggested the Reverend Smith Boyd with pleasant ease, though he felt relieved that she was going.

The sudden snap in Gail's eyes fairly scintillated. It was like the shattering of fine glass in the sunlight.

"It seems to be a remarkably lucrative enterprise," she smiled up at him, and was rewarded by a snort from Uncle Jim and a chuckle from silvery-bearded Rufus Manning. Allison frankly guffawed. The balance of the sedate vestry was struck dumb by the impertinence.

Gail felt the eyes of the Reverend Smith Boyd fixed steadily on her, and turned to meet them. They were cold. She had thought them blue; but now they were green! She stared back into them for a moment, and a little red spot came into the delicate tint of her oval cheeks; then she turned deliberately to the marvellously beautiful big transept window. It had been designed by the most famous stained-glass artist in the world, and its subject lent itself to a wealth of colour. It was Christ turning the money changers out of the temple!

CHAPTER II

“ WHY? ”

“**S**NOW!” exclaimed Gail in delight, turning up her face to the delicate flakes. “And the sun shining. That means snow to-morrow!”

Allison helped her into his big, piratical looking run-about, and tucked her in as if she were some fragile hot-house plant which might freeze with the first cool draught. He looked, with keen appreciation, at her fresh cheeks and sparkling eyes and softly waving hair. He had never given himself much time for women, but this girl was a distinct individual. It was not her undeniable beauty which he found so attractive. He had met many beautiful women. Nor was it charm of manner, nor the thing called personal magnetism, nor the intelligence which gleamed from her eyes. It was something intangible and baffling which had chained his interest from the moment she had appeared in the vestry doorway, and since he was a man who had never admitted the existence of mysteries, his own perplexity puzzled him.

“The pretty white snow is no friend of mine,” he assured her, as he took the wheel and headed towards the Avenue. He looked calculatingly into the sky. “This particular downfall is likely to cost the Municipal Transportation Company several thousand dollars.”

“I’m curious to know the commercial value of a sun-

set in New York," Gail smiled up at him. Her eyes closed for a swift instant, her long, brown lashes curving down on her cheeks, but beneath them was an infinitesimal gleam; and Allison had the impression that under the cover of her exquisitely veined lids she was looking at him corner-wise, and having a great deal of fun all by herself.

"We haven't capitalised sunsets yet, but we have hopes," he laughed.

"Then there's still a commercial opportunity," she lightly returned. "I feel quite friendly to money, but it's so intimate here. I've heard nothing else since I came, on Monday."

"Even in church," he chuckled. "You delivered a reckless shock to the Reverend Smith Boyd's vestry."

"Well?" she demanded. "Didn't he ask my opinion?"

"I don't think he'll make the mistake again," and Allison took the corner into the Avenue at a speed which made Gail, unused to bare inches of leeway, class Allison as a demon driver. The tall traffic policeman around whose upraised arm they had circled smiled a frank tribute to her beauty, and she felt relieved. She had cherished some feeling that they should be arrested.

"However, even a church must discuss money," went on Allison, as if he had just decided a problem to which he had given weighty thought.

"Fifty millions isn't mere money," retorted Gail; "it's criminal wealth. If no man can make a million dollars honestly, how can a church?"

Allison swerved out into the centre of the Avenue and passed a red limousine before he answered. He had noticed that everybody in the street stared into his car,

and it flattered him immensely to have so pretty a girl with him.

“The wealth of Market Square Church is natural and normal,” he explained. “It arises partly from the increase in value of property which was donated when practically worthless. Judicious investment is responsible for the balance.”

“Oh, bother!” and Gail glanced at him impatiently. “Your natural impulse is to defend wealth because it is wealth; but you know that Market Square Church never should have had a surplus to invest. The money should have been spent in charity. Why are they saving it?”

Allison began to feel the same respect for Gail’s mental processes which he would for a man’s, though, when he looked at her with this thought in mind, she was so thoroughly feminine that she puzzled him more than ever.

“Market Square Church has an ambition worthy of its vestry,” he informed her, bringing his runabout to rest, with a swift glide, just an accurate three inches behind the taxi in front of them. “When it has fifty million dollars, it proposes to start building the most magnificent cathedral on American soil.”

Gail watched the up-town traffic piling around them, wedging them in, packing them tightly on all sides, and felt that they must be hours in extricating themselves from this tangle of shining-bodied vehicles. The skies had turned grey by now, and the snow was thicker in the air. The flakes drove, with a cool, refreshing snap, into her face.

“Why?” she pondered. “Will a fifty million dollar cathedral save souls in proportion to the amount of money invested?”

Allison enjoyed that query thoroughly.

"You must ask the Reverend Smith Boyd," he chuckled. "You talk like a heathen!"

"I am," she calmly avowed. "I've been a heathen ever since a certain respectable old religious body dropped the theory of infant damnation from its creed. Its body of elders decided to save the souls of unbaptised babies from everlasting hell-fire; and the anti-damnation wing won by three grey-whiskered votes."

Proper ladies in the nearby cars stared with haughty disapproval at Allison, whose degree of appreciation necessitated a howl. Gail, however, did not join in the mirth. That telltale red spot had appeared in the delicate pink of her cheeks. She was still angry with the man-made creed which had taught a belief so horrible. The traffic blockade was lifted, and Allison's clutch slammed. The whole mass of vehicles moved forwards, and in two blocks up the Avenue they had scattered like chaff. Allison darted into an opening between two cars, his runabout skidded, and missed a little electric by a hair's breadth. He had no personal interest in religion, but he had in Gail.

"So you turned infidel."

"Oh no," returned Gail gravely, and with a new tone. "I pray every morning and every night, and God hears me." The note of reverence in her voice was a thing to which Allison gave instant respect. "I have no quarrel with religion, only with theology. I attend church because its spiritual influence has survived in spite of outgrown rites. I take part in the services, though I will not repeat the creed. Why, Mr. Allison, I love the church, and the most notable man in the future history of the world will be the man who saves it from dead dogma." Her eyes were glowing, the same

eyes which had closed in satirical mischief. Now they were rapt. “What a stunning collie!” she suddenly exclaimed.

Allison, who had followed her with admiring attention, his mind accompanying hers in eager leaps, laughed in relief. After all, she was a girl — and what a girl! The exhilaration of the drive, and of the snow beating in her face, and of the animated conversation, had set the clear skin of her face aglow with colour. Her deep red lips, exquisitely curved and half parted, displayed a row of dazzling white teeth, and the elbow which touched his was magnetic. Allison refused to believe that he was forty-five!

“You’re fond of collies,” he guessed, surprised to find himself with an eager interest in the likes and dislikes of a young girl. It was a new experience.

“I adore them!” she enthusiastically declared. “Back home, I have one of every marking but a pure white.”

There was something tender and wistful in the tone of that “back home.” No doubt she had hosts of friends and admirers there, possibly a favoured suitor. It was quite likely. A girl such as Gail Sargent could hardly escape it. If there was a favoured suitor Allison rather pitied him, for Gail was in the city of strong men. Busy with an entirely new and strange group of thoughts, Allison turned into the Park, and Gail uttered an exclamation of delight as the fresh, keen air whipped in her face. The snow was like a filmy white veil against the bare trees, and enough of it had clung, by now, to outline, with silver pointing, the lacework of branches. On the turf, still green from the open winter, it lay in thin white patches, and squirrels, clad in their sleek winter garments, were already scampering

to their beds, crossing the busy drive with the adroitness of accomplished metropolitan pedestrians, their bushy tails hopping behind them in ungainly loops.

The pair in the runabout were silent, for the east drive at this hour was thronged with outward bound machines, and the roadway was slippery with the new-fallen snow. Steady of nerve, keen of eye, firm of hand! Gail watched the alert figure of Allison, tensely and yet easily motionless, in the seat beside her. The terrific swiftness of everything impressed her. Every car was going at top speed, and it seemed that she was in a constant maze of hair-breadth escapes. By and by, however, she found another and a greater marvel; that in all this breathless driving, there was no recklessness. Capability, that was the word for which she had been groping. No man could survive here, and rest his feet upon the under layer, unless he possessed superior ability, superior will, superior strength. She arrived at exactly the same phrase Allison had entertained five minutes before; "the city of strong men"! Again she turned to the man at her side for a critical inspection, in this new light. His frame was powerful, and the square, high forehead, with the bulges of concentration above the brows, showed his mental equipment to be equally as rugged. His profile was a crisply cut silhouette against the wintry grey; straight nose, full, firm lips, pointed chin, square jaw. He was a fair example of all this force.

Perhaps feeling the steady gaze, Allison turned to her suddenly, and for a moment the grey eyes and the brown ones looked questioningly into each other, then there leaped from the man to the woman a something which held her gaze a full second longer than she would have wished.

"Air's great," he said with a smile.

"Glorious!" she agreed. "I don't want to go in."

"Don't," he promptly advised her.

"That's a simple enough solution," and her laugh, in the snow-laden air, reminded him, in one of those queer flashes of memory, of a little string of sleighbells he had owned as a youngster. "However, I promised Cousin Lucile."

"We'll stop at the house long enough to tell her you're busy," suggested Allison, as eager as a boy. He had been on his way home to dress for a business banquet, but such affairs came often, and impulsive adventures like this could be about once in a lifetime with him. He had played the grubbing game so assiduously that, while he had advanced, as one of his lieutenants said, from a street car strap to his present mastership of traction facilities, he had missed a lot of things on the way. He was energetic to make up for the loss, however. He felt quite ready to pour a few gallons of gasoline into his runabout and go straight on to Boston, or any other place Gail might suggest; and there was an exhilaration in his voice which was contagious.

"Let's!" cried Gail, and, with a laugh which he had discarded with his first business promotion, Allison threw out another notch of speed, and whirled from the Seventy-second Street entrance up the Avenue to the proper turning, and halfway down the block, where he made a swift but smooth stop, bringing the step with marvellous accuracy to within an inch of the curb.

"Won't you come in?" invited Gail.

"We'd stay too long," grinned Allison, entering into the conspiracy with great fervour.

She flashed at him a smile and ran up the steps. She

turned to him again as she waited for the bell to be answered, and nodded to him with frank comradery.

"Time me," she called, and he jerked out his watch as she slipped in at the door.

Two vivacious looking young women, one tall and black-haired and the other petite and blonde, and both fashionably slender and both pretty, rushed out into the hall and surrounded her.

"We thought you'd never come," rattled Lucile Teasdale, who was the petite blonde, and the daughter of the sister of the wife of Gail's Uncle Jim.

"Who's the man?" demanded Mrs. "Arly" Fosland, with breathless interest.

"Where's my tea?" answered Gail.

"We saw you dash up," supplemented Lucile. "We thought it was a fire."

"Why doesn't he come in?" this from Arly, in whom two years of polite married life had not destroyed an innocently eager curiosity to inspect eligibles at close range, for her friends.

"Who is he?" insisted Lucile, peeping out of the hall window.

"Edward E. Allison," primly announced Gail, suppressing a giggle. "I got him at Uncle Jim's vestry meeting. He's waiting to take me riding in the Park. Where's my tea?"

"Edward E. Allison!" gasped "Arly" Fosland. "Why, he's the richest bachelor in New York, even if he isn't a social butterfly," and she contemplated Gail in sisterly wonder and admiration. "Good gracious, child, run!"

"Come for the tea to-morrow!" urged Lucile.

They were all three laughing, and the two young married women were pushing Gail forward. At the

door Lucile and Arly separated from her, to peer out of the two side windows.

“He doesn’t look so old,” speculated Arly; and Lucile opened the door.

“Good-bye, dearie,” and Lucile kissed her cousin in plain sight of the curb, upon which there was nothing for that young lady to do but go.

For an instant, Edward E. Allison had a glimpse of her, in her garnet and turquoise, flanked by a sprightly vision in blue and another sprightly vision in pink, and he thought he heard the suppressed sounds of tittering; then the door closed, and the lace curtains of the hall windows bulged outward, and Gail came tripping down the steps.

“Two minutes and forty-eight seconds,” called Allison, putting away his stop watch with one hand and helping her with the other. He tucked her in more quickly than at the church, but with equal care, then he jumped in beside her, and never had he cut so swift and sure a circle with his sixty horse-power runabout.

They raced up and into the Park, and around the winding driveways with the light-hearted exhilaration of children, and if there was in them at that moment any trace of mature thought, they were neither one aware of it. They were glad that they were just living, and moving swiftly in the open air, glad that it was snowing, glad that the light was beginning to fade, that there were other vehicles in the Park, that the world was such a bright and happy place; and they were quite pleased, too, to be together.

It was still light, though the electric lamps were beginning to flare up through the thin snow veil, when they rounded a rocky drive, and came in view of a little lookout house perched on a hill.”

"Oh!" called Gail, involuntarily putting her hand on his arm. "I want to go up there!"

The work of Edward E. Allison was well nigh perfection. He stopped the runabout exactly at the centre of the pathway, and was out and on Gail's side of the car with the agility of a youngster after a robin's egg. He helped her to alight, and would have helped her up the hill with great pleasure, but she was too nimble and too eager for that, and was in the lookout house several steps ahead of him.

"It's glorious," she said, and her low, melodious voice thrilled him again with that strange quality he had noticed when she had first spoken at the vestry meeting.

Below them lay a grey mist, dotted here and there with haloed lights, which receded in the distance into tiny yellow blurs, while the nearer lamps were swathed in swirling snowflakes. Nearby were ghosts of trees projecting their tops from the misty lake, and out of what seemed a vast eerie depth came the clang of street cars, and the rumble of the distant elevated, and the honks of auto horns, and all the rattle and roar of the great city, muffled and subdued.

"It's like being out of the world." He was astonished to find in himself the sudden growth of a poetic spirit, and his voice had in it the modulation which went with the sentiment.

"This was created," mused Gail, as if answering an inner question. "Why should the clumsy minds of men destroy the simplicity of anything so vast, and good, and beautiful, as our instinctive belief in the Creator?"

Finding no answer in his experience to this unfathomable mystery, Edward E. Allison very wisely kept still and admired the scenery, which consisted of one girl framed tastefully in a miscellaneous assortment of snow-

flakes. When he tried to unravel the girl, he found her a still more fathomless mystery, and gave up the task in a hurry. After all, she was right there, and that was enough.

When she was quite finished with the view, she turned and went down the hill, and Edward Allison nearly sprained his spinal column in getting just ahead of her on the steepened narrow path. It was treacherous walking just there, with the freshly fallen snow on the shale stones. He was heartily glad that he had taken this precaution, for, near the bottom of the hill, one of her tiny French heels slid, and she might have fallen had it not been for the iron-like arm which he threw back to support her. For just an instant she was thrown fairly in his embrace, with his arm about her waist, and her weight upon his breast; and, in that instant, the fire which had been smouldering in him all afternoon burst into flame. With a mighty repression he resisted the impulse to crush her to him, and handed her to the equilibrium which she instinctively sought, though the arm trembled which had been pressed about her. His heart sang, as he helped her into the machine, and sprang in beside her. He felt a savage joy in his strength as he started the car and felt the wheel under his hard grip. He was young, younger than he had ever been in his boyhood; strong, stronger than he had ever been in his youth. What worlds he might conquer now with this new blood racing through his veins. It was as if he had been suddenly thrust into the fires of eternal life, and endowed with all the vast, irresistible force of creation!

Gail, too, was disturbed. While she had laughed to cover the embarrassment of her mishap, she had been quite collected enough to thank Allison for his ready

aid; but she had felt the thrill of that tensed arm, and it had awakened in her mind an entirely new vein of puzzled conjecture. They were both silent, and busy with that new world which opens up when any two congenial personalities meet, as they raced out of the Park, and over One Hundred and Tenth Street, and up Riverside Drive, and out Old Broadway. Occasionally they exchanged bits of spineless repartee, and laughed at it, but this was only perfunctory, for they had left the boy and girl back yonder in the park.

Gravity with a man invariably leads him back to the consideration of his leading joy in life, business; and the first thing Allison knew he was indulging in quite a unique weakness, for him; he was bragging! Not exactly flatfooted; but, with tolerably strong insinuation, he gave her to understand that the consolidation of the immense traction interests of New York was about as tremendous an undertaking as she could comprehend, and that, having attained so dizzy a summit, he felt entitled to turn himself to lighter things, to enjoy life and gaiety and frivolity, to rest, as it were, upon his laurels.

Gail was amused, as she always was when men of strong achievement dropped into this weakness to interest girls. She did appreciate and admire his no doubt tremendous accomplishment; it was only his naivete which amused her, and to save her she could not resist the wicked little impulse to nettle him. To his suggestion that he could now lead a merry life because he was entitled to rest upon his laurels, she had merely answered "Why?"

He dropped into a silence so dense that the thump was almost audible, and she was contrite. She had pricked him deeper than she knew, however. She had

not understood how gigantic the man's ambitions had been, nor how vain he was of his really marvellous progress. After all, why should he pause, when he had such power in him? She did well to speak slightly of any achievement made by a man of such proved ability. New ambitions sprang up in him. The next time he talked of business with her he would have something startling under way; something to compel her respect. The muscles of his jaws knotted. It was like being dared to climb higher in a swaying tree.

“Oh, it's dark!” suddenly discovered Gail. “Auntie will be frantic.”

“That's so,” regretfully agreed Allison, who, having no Aunties of his own, was prone to forget them. “We'll stop up at this roadhouse, and you can telephone her,” and he turned in at the drive where rose petalled lights gleamed out from the latticed windows of a low-caved building. Dozens of autos, parked amid the snow-sheeted shrubbery, glared at them with big yellow eyes, and, through the windows, were white cloths and sparkling glassware, and laughing groups about the tables, and hurrying waiters. There was music, too, slow, languorous music!

“Doesn't it look inviting!” exclaimed Allison, becoming instantly aware of the pangs of hunger.

“It's an enchanting place!” agreed Gail enthusiastically.

Allison hesitated a moment.

“Tell your aunt we're dining here,” he suggested.

She laughed aloud.

“Wouldn't it be fun,” she speculated, and Allison led her in to the phone. She turned to him with a snap in her eyes at the door of the booth. “It depends on who answers.”

CHAPTER III

THE CHANGE IN THE RECTOR'S EYES

THE grand privilege of Mrs. Jim Sargent's happy life was to worry all she liked. She began with the rise of the sun, and worried about the silver chest; whether it had been locked over night. Usually she slipped downstairs, in the grey of the morning, to see, and, thus happily started on the day, she worried about breakfast and luncheon and dinner; and Jim and her sister and her niece, Lucile; and the servants and the horses and the flowers; and at nights she lay awake and heard burglars. Just now, as she sat on the seven chairs and the four benches of the mahogany panelled library, amid a wealth of serious-minded sculpture and painting and rare old prints, she was bathed in a new ecstasy of painful enjoyment. She was worried about Gail! It was six-thirty now, and Gail had not yet returned from Lucile's.

At irregular intervals, say first two minutes and then three and a half, and then one, she walked into the Louis XIV reception parlour, and made up her mind to have a new jeweller try his hand at the sun-ray clock, and looked out of the windows to see if Lucile's car was arriving. Between times she pursued her favourite literary diversion; reading the automobile accidents in the evening papers. She had spent all her later years in looking for Jim's name among the list of the maimed!

Mrs. Helen Davies, dressed for dinner with as much care as if she had been about to attend one of the unattainable Mrs. Waverly-Gaites' annuals, came sweeping down the marble stairs with the calm aplomb of one whom nothing can disturb, and, lorgnette in hand, turned into the library without even a glance into the floor-length mirror in the hall. Her amber beaded gown was set perfectly on her fine shoulders, and her black hair, fashionably streaked with grey, was properly done, as she was perfectly aware.

"I'm so glad you came down, Helen!" breathed Mrs. Sargent, with a sigh of relief. "I'm so worried!"

"Naturally, Grace," returned her sister Helen, who was reputed to be gifted in repartee. "One would be, under the circumstances. What are they?" and she tapped her chin delicately with the tip of her lorgnette, as a warning to an insipient yawn. It was no longer good form to be bored.

"Gail!" replied Mrs. Sargent, who was inclined to dumpiness and a decided contrast to her stately widowed sister. "She hasn't come home from Lucile's!"

Mrs. Helen Davies sat beneath the statue of Minerva presenting wisdom to the world, and arranged the folds of her gown to the most graceful advantage.

"You shouldn't expect her on time, coming from Lucile's," she observed, with a smile of proper pride. She was immensely fond of her daughter Lucile; but she preferred to live with her sister. "I have a brilliant idea, Grace. I'll telephone," and without seeming to exert herself in the least, she glided from her picturesque high-backed flemish chair, and sat at the library table, and drew the phone to her, and secured her daughter's number.

"Hello, Lucile," she called, in the most friendly of

tones. "You'd better send Gail home, before your Aunt Grace develops wrinkles."

"Gail isn't here," reported Lucile triumphantly. "She dropped in, two hours ago, and dropped right out, without waiting for her tea. You'd never guess with whom she's driving! Edward E. Allison! He's the richest bachelor in New York!"

Mrs. Helen Davies turned to her anxious sister with a sparkle in her black eyes.

"It's all right, Grace," and then she turned eagerly to the phone. "Did he come in?"

"They were in too big a rush," jabbered Lucile excitedly. "He doesn't look old at all. Arly and I watched them drive away. They seemed to be great chums. Gail got him at Uncle Jim's vestry. Doesn't she look stunning in red!"

"Where is she?" interrupted Mrs. Sargent, holding her thumb.

"Out driving," reported sister Helen. "Have you sent your invitations for the house party, Lucile?" and she discussed that important subject until Mrs. Sargent's thumb ached.

"With whom is Gail driving, and where?" asked sister Grace, anxious for detail.

Mrs. Helen Davies touched all of her fingertips together in front of her on the library table, and beamed on Grace.

"Don't worry about Gail," she smilingly advised. "She is driving with Edward E. Allison. He is the richest bachelor in New York, though not socially prominent. No one has ever been able to interest him. I predict for Gail a brilliant future," and she moved over contentedly to her favourite contrast with Minerva.

"Gail would attract any one," returned Mrs. Sar-

gent complacently, and then a little crease came in her brow. "I wonder where she met him."

"At the vestry meeting, Lucile said."

"Oh," and Mrs. Sargent's brow cleared instantly. "Jim introduced them. I wonder where Jim is!"

"I am glad Gail is not definitely engaged," mused Mrs. Davies. "I am pleased with her. Young Mr. Clemmens may seem to be a very brilliant match, back home, but, with her exceptional advantages, she has every right to expect to do better."

Again the creases came in Mrs. Sargent's brow.

"I don't know," she worried. "Gail has had four letters in four days from Mr. Clemmens. Of course, if she genuinely cares for him —"

"But she doesn't," Helen comforted herself, figuring it all out carefully. "A young man who would write a letter a day, would exert every possible pressure to secure a promise, before he would let a beautiful creature like Gail come to New York for the winter; and the fact that he did not succeed proves, conclusively, that she has not made up her mind about him."

The door opened, and Jim Sargent came in, wiping the snow from his stubby moustache before he distributed his customary hearty greetings to the family.

"Where's Gail?" he wanted to know.

"Out driving with Edward E. Allison," answered both ladies.

"Still?" inquired Jim Sargent, and then he laughed. "She's a clever girl. Smart as a whip! She nearly started a riot in the vestry."

"Was Willis Cunningham there?" inquired Mrs. Davies interestedly.

"Took me in a corner after the meeting and told

me that Gail bore a remarkable resemblance to the Fratelli Madonna, and might he call."

"Mr. Cunningham is one of the men I was anxious for her to meet," and Mrs. Davies touched her second finger, as if she were checking off a list.

"What did Gail do?" wondered Mrs. Sargent.

Jim, crossing to the door, chuckled, and removed his watch chain from his vest.

"Told Boyd that Market Square Church was a good business proposition."

The ladies did not share his amusement.

"To the Reverend Boyd!" breathed Mrs. Sargent, shocked. She considered the Reverend Smith Boyd the most wonderful young man of his age.

"How undiplomatic," worried Mrs. Davies. "I must have a little talk with her about cleverness. It's dangerous in a girl."

"Not these days," declared Jim Sargent, who stood ready to defend Gail, right or wrong, at every angle. "Allison and Manning enjoyed it immensely."

"Oh," remarked Helen Davies, somewhat mollified. "And Mr. Cunningham?"

"And what did the Reverend Boyd say?" inquired Mrs. Sargent, much concerned.

"I don't think he liked it very well," speculated Gail's Uncle Jim. "He's coming over to-night to discuss church matters. I'll have to dress in a hurry," and he looked at the watch which he held, with its chain, in his hand.

The telephone bell rang, and Sargent, who could not train himself to wait for a servant to sift the messages, answered it immediately, with his characteristic explosive-first-syllabled:

"Hello!"

"Oh, it's you, Uncle Jim," called a buoyant voice. "Mr. Allison and I have found the most enchanting roadhouse in the world, and we're going to take dinner here. It's all right, isn't it?"

"Certainly," he replied, equally buoyant. "Enjoy yourself, Chubsy," and he hung up the receiver.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Davies, in a tone distinctly chill. She had a premonition that Jim Sargent had done something foolish. He seemed so pleased.

"Gail won't be home," he announced carelessly, starting for the stairs. "She's dining with Allison at some roadhouse."

"Unchaperoned!" gasped Mrs. Davies.

"She's all right, Helen," remarked Jim, starting upstairs. "Allison's a fine fellow."

"But what will he think of Gail!" protested Helen. "That sort of unconventionality has gone clear out. Jim, you'll have to get back that number!"

"Sorry," regretted Jim. "Can't do it. Against the telephone rules," and he went on upstairs, positively humming!

The two ladies looked at each other, and sat down in the valley of the shadows of gloom. There was nothing to be done! Mrs. Davies, however, was different from her sister. Grace Sargent was an accomplished worrier, who could remain numb in the exercise of her art, but Helen Davies was a woman of action. She presently called her daughter.

"Have you started your dinner, Lucile?" she demanded.

"No, Ted just came home," reported Lucile. "What's the matter?"

"Don't let him take time to dress," urged her mother. "You must go right out and chaperon Gail."

"Where is she?" Lucile delayed to inquire.

"At some roadhouse, dining with Mr. Allison!"

"Well, what do you think of Gail!" exulted Lucile. "Oh, Arly!" and Mrs. Davies heard the receiver drop to the end of its line. She heard laughter, and then the voice of Lucile again. "Mother, she's with Edward E. Allison, and they'll do better without a chaperon. Besides, mother dear, there's a million roadhouses. We'll come down after dinner. I want to see her when she returns."

"I don't suppose she could be found, except by accident," granted her mother, and gave up the enterprise. "Times are constantly changing," she complained to her sister. "The management of a girl becomes more difficult every year. So much freedom makes them disregarding of the aid of their elders in making a selection."

It was not until nine o'clock that the ladies expressed their worry again. At that hour, Ted and Lucile Teasdale and Arly Fosland came in with the exuberance of a New Year's Eve celebration.

"It's great sleighing to-night," stated Lucile's husband, who was a thin-waisted young man, with a splendid natural gift for dancing.

"All that's missing is the bells," chattered the black-haired Arly, breaking straight for her favourite big couch in the library. "The only way to have any speed in an auto is to go sidewise."

"We're to get up a skidding match, so I can bet on our chauffeur," laughed Lucile, fluffing her blonde ringlets before the big mirror in the hall. "We slid a complete circle coming down through the Park, and never lost a revolution!"

"I've been thinking it must be bad driving," fretted Mrs. Sargent. "Gail should be home by now!"

"Allison's a safe driver," comforted Ted, who liked to see everybody happy.

Jim Sargent came to the door of the study, in which he was closeted with the Reverend Smith Boyd. Jim was practically the young rector's business guardian.

"Hello, folks," he nodded. "Gail home?"

"Not yet," responded Mrs. Sargent, in whose brow the creases were becoming fixed.

"It's hardly time," estimated Jim, and went back in the study.

"Ted has a new divinity," boasted the wife of that agreeable young man.

"Had, you mean," corrected Ted. "She's deserted me for a single man."

"Is it the Piccadilly widow?" inquired Arly, punching another pillow under her elbow.

"Certainly," corroborated Ted. "You don't suppose I have a new one every day."

"You're losing your power of fascination then," retorted Arly. "Lucile's still in the running with two a day."

"She should have her kind by the dozen," responded Ted, complacently stroking his glossy moustache.

"The young set takes up some peculiar fads," mused Mrs. Davies, with a trace of concern. "I can't quite accustom myself to the sanction of flirting."

"Neither can I," agreed Ted. "It takes the fun out of it."

"The only joy is in boasting about it at home," complained Arly Fosland. "I can't even get Gerald interested in my affairs, so I've dropped them."

"Gerald wouldn't understand a flirtation of his own," criticised Ted. "I never saw a man who made such hard work of belonging to twelve clubs. Arly, how did you manage to make him see your fatal lure?"

"Mother did it," returned Arly, drowsily absorbing the grateful warmth of the room.

"I don't think anything is half so dangerous to a bachelor as a mother," stated Lucile, with a friendly smile at Mrs. Davies.

"I'm going to start a new fad," announced Arly, sitting up and considering the matter; "prudery. There's nothing more effective."

"It's too wicked," objected Lucile's mother, and scored another point for herself. It was a wearing task to keep up a reputation for repartee.

"I'm terribly vexed," confided Lucile, stopping behind Ted's chair, and idly tickling the back of his neck. "I thought it would be such a brilliant scheme to give a winter week-end party, but Mrs. Acton is going to give one at her country place."

"Before or after?" demanded Mrs. Davies, with whom this was a point of the utmost importance.

"A week after," answered Lucile, "but her invitations are out. I wish I hadn't mailed mine. What can we do to make ours notable?"

That being a matter worth considering, the entire party, with the exception of Aunt Grace, who was listening for the doorbell, set their wits and their tongues to work. Mrs. Helen Davies took a keener interest in it than any of them. The invitation list was the most important of all, for it was a long and arduous way to the heaven of the socially elect, and it took generations to accomplish the journey. The Murdock girls, Grace

and herself, had no great-grandfather. Murdock Senior had made his money after Murdock Junior was married, but in time to give the girls a thorough polishing in an exclusive academy. Thus launched, Helen had married a man with a great-great-grandfather, but Grace had married Jim Sargent. Jim was a dear, and had plenty of money, and was as good a railroader as Grace's father, with whom he had been great chums; but still he was Jim Sargent. Gail's mother, who had married Jim's brother, had seven ancestors, but a mother's family name is so often overlooked. Nevertheless, when Gail came to marry, the maternal ancestry, all other things being favourable, might even secure her an invitation to Mrs. Waverly-Gaites' annual! Reaching this point in her circle of speculation, Mrs. Helen Davies came back to her starting place, and looked at the library clock with a shock. Ten; and the girl was not yet home!

The Reverend Smith Boyd came out of the study with his most active vestryman, and joined the circle of waiting ones. He was a pleasant addition to the party, for, in spite of belonging to the clergy, he was able to conduct himself, in Rome, in a quite acceptable Roman fashion. Pleasant as he was, they wished he would go home, because it was not convenient to worry in his company; and by this time Lucile herself was beginning to watch the clock with some anxiety. Only Mrs. Sargent felt no restraint. An automobile honked at the door as if it were stopping, and she half arose; then the same honk sounded half way down the block, and she sat down again.

"I'm so worried about Gail!" she stated, holding her thumb.

"We all are," supplemented Mrs. Davies quickly. "She has been dining with a party of friends, and the streets are so slippery."

"I should judge Mr. Allison to be a very capable driver," said the Reverend Smith Boyd; and the ladies glared at Jim. "I envy them their drive on a night like this. I wonder if there will be good coasting."

"Fine," judged Jim Sargent, looking out of the window toward the adjoining rectory. "That first snow was wet and it froze. Now there's a good inch on top of it, and, at this rate, there should be three by morning. A little thaw, and another freeze, and a little more snow to-morrow, and I'll be tempted to make a bob-sled."

"I'll help you," offered the Reverend Smith Boyd, with a glow of pleasure in his particularly fine eyes. "I used to have a twelve seated bob-sled, which never started down the hill with less than fifteen."

"I never rode on one," complained Arly. "I think I'm due for a bob-sled party."

"You're invited," Lucile promptly told her. "Uncle Jim, you and Dr. Boyd will have to hunt up your hammer and saw."

"I'll start right to work," offered the young rector, with the alacrity which had made him a favourite.

"If the snow holds, we'll go over into the Jersey hills, and slide," promised Sargent with enthusiasm. "I'll give the party."

"I seem to anticipate a pleasant evening," considered Ted Teasdale, whose athletics were confined entirely to dancing. "We'll ride down hill on the sleds, and up hill in the machines."

"That's barred," immediately protested Jim. "The

boys have to pull the girls up hill. Isn't that right, Boyd?"

"It was correct form when I was a boy," returned the rector, with a laugh. He held his muscular hands out before him as if he could still feel the cut of the rope in his palms. He squared his big shoulders, and breathed deeply, in memory of those health-giving days. There was a flush in his cheeks, and his eyes, which were sometimes green, glowed with a decided blue. Arlene Fosland, looking lazily across at him, from the comfortable nest which she had not quitted all evening, decided that it was a shame that he had been cramped into the ministry.

"There's Gail!" cried Mrs. Sargent, jumping to her feet and running into the hall, before the butler could come in answer to the bell. She opened the door, and was immediately kissed, then Gail came back into the library without stopping to remove her furs. She was followed by Allison, and she carried something inside her coat. Her cheeks were rosy, from the crisp air, and the snow sparkled on her brown hair like tiny diamonds.

"We've been buying a dog!" she breathlessly explained, and, opening her coat, she produced an animated teddy bear, with two black eyes and one black pointed nose protruding from a puff ball of pure white. She set it on the floor, where it waddled uncertainly in three directions, and finally curled between the Reverend Smith Boyd's feet.

"A collie!" and the Reverend Smith Boyd picked up the warm infant for an admiring inspection. "It's a beautiful puppy."

"Isn't it a dear!" exclaimed Gail, taking it away

from him, and favouring him with a smile. She whisked the fluffy little ball over to her Aunt Grace, and left it in that lady's lap, while she threw off her furs.

"Where could you buy a dog at this hour?" inquired Mrs. Davies, glancing at the clock, which stood now at the accusing hour of a quarter of eleven.

"We woke up the kennel man," laughed Gail, turning, with a sparkling glance, to Allison, who was being introduced ceremoniously to the ladies by Uncle Jim. "We had a perfectly glorious evening! We dined at Roseleaf Inn, entirely surrounded by hectic lights, then we drove five miles into the country and bought Flakes. We came home so fast that Mr. Allison almost had to hold me in." She turned, laughing, to find the eyes of the Reverend Smith Boyd fixed on her in cold disapproval. They were no longer blue!

CHAPTER IV

TOO MANY MEN

“**A** CONSCIENCE must be a nuisance to a rector,” sympathised Gail Sargent, as she walked up the hill beside the Reverend Smith Boyd.

The tall, young rector shifted the thin rope of the sled to his other hand.

“Epigrams are usually more clever than true,” he finally responded, with a twinkle in his eyes. It had been in his mind to sharply defend that charge, but he reflected that it was unwise to assume the speech worth serious consideration. Moreover, he had come to this toboggan party for healthful physical exercise!

“Then you’re guilty of an epigram,” retorted Gail, who was annoyed with the Reverend Smith Boyd without quite knowing why. “You can’t believe all you are compelled, as a minister, to say.”

“That,” returned the Reverend Smith Boyd coldly, “is a matter of interpretation.” He commended himself for his patience, as he proceeded to instruct this mistaken young person. She was a lovable girl, in spite of the many things he found in her of which to disapprove. “The eye of the needle through which the camel was supposed not to be able to pass, was, in reality, a narrow city gate called the Needle’s Eye.”

Gail looked at him with that little smile at the corners of her red lips, eyelids down, curved lashes on

her cheeks, and beneath the lashes a sparkle brighter than the moonlight on the snow crystals in the adjoining field.

"It seems to me there was something about wealth in that metaphor," she observed, her round eyes flashing open as she smiled up at him. "If it was so difficult even in those days for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, how can a rich church hope to enter the spirit of the gospel?"

The Reverend Smith Boyd hastily, and almost roughly, drew her aside, as a long, low bob-sled, accompanied by appropriate screams, came streaking down the hill, and passed them. They both turned and followed its progress down the narrowing white road, to where it curved away in a silver line far at the bottom of a hill. Hills and valleys, and fences and trees, and even a distant stream were covered with the fleecy mantle of winter, while high over head in a sky of blue, hung a round, white moon, which flooded the country-side with mellow light, and strewed upon earth's fresh robe a wealth of countless sparkling gems.

"This is a wonderful sermon," mused Gail; then she turned to the rector. She softened toward him, as she saw that he, too, had partaken of the awe and majesty of this scene. He stood straight and tall, his splendidly poised head thrown back, and his gaze resting far off where the hills cut against the sky in tree-clad scallops.

"It is an inspiration," he told her, with a tone in his vibrant voice which she had not heard before; and for that brief instant these two, between whom there had seemed some instinctive antagonism, were nearer in sympathy than either had thought it possible to be. Then the Reverend Smith Boyd happened to remember

something. "The morality or immorality of riches depends upon its use," he sonorously stated, as he stepped out into the road again, dragging his sled behind him, following the noisy, loitering crowd with the number two bob-sled. "Market Square Church, which is the one I suppose you meant in your comparison with the rich man, intends to devote all the means with which a kind Providence has blessed it, to the glory of God."

"And the gratification of the billionaire vestry," she added, still annoyed with the Reverend Smith Boyd, though she did not know why.

He turned to her almost savagely.

"Have you no sense of reverence?" he demanded.

"For the church, or the creed, or the ministry? Not a particle!" she heartily assured him. "The church, as an instrument for good, has practically ceased to exist. Even charity, the greatest of the three principles upon which the church was originally founded, has been taken away from it, because the secular organisations dispense charity better and more sanely, and while the object is still alive."

Again the Reverend Smith Boyd drew her out of the road, almost ungently, and unnecessarily in advance of need, to permit a thick man to glide leisurely by, on his stomach on a hand sled. He grinned up at them from under a stubby moustache, and waved a hand at them with a vigour which nearly ran him into a ditch; but a sharp scrape of his toe in the snow, made with a stab the expertness of which had come back to him through forty years, brought him into the path again, and he slid majestically onward, with happy forgetfulness of the dignity belonging to the president of the Towando Valley Railroad and a vestryman of Market Square Church.

"That used to be lots of fun," remembered Gail, looking after her Uncle Jim in envy.

"Market Square Church has dispensed millions in charity," the rector felt it his duty to inform her, as they started up the hill again.

"If it's like our church at home it costs ninety cents to deliver a dime," she retorted, bristling anew with bygone aggravations. "So long as you can deliver baskets of provisions in person, it is all right, but the minute you let the money out of your sight it filters through too many paid hands. I found this out just before I resigned from our charity committee."

He looked at her in perplexity. She was so young and so pretty, so charming in the ermine which framed her pink face, so gentle of speech and movement, that her visible self and her incisive mind seemed to be two different creatures.

"Why are you so bitter against the church?" and his tone was troubled, not so much about what she had said, but about her.

"I didn't know I was," she confessed, concerned about it herself. "All at once I seem to look on it as an old shoe which should be cast aside. It is so elaborate to do so little good in the world. Morality is on the increase, as any page of history will show."

"I believe that to be true," he hastily assured her, glad to be able to agree with her upon something.

"But it is in spite of the church, not because of it," she immediately added. "You can't say that there is a tremendous moral influence in a congregation which numbers eight hundred, and sends less than fifty to services. The balance show their devotion to Christianity by a quarterly check."

The Reverend Smith Boyd felt unfairly hit.

"That is the sorrow of the church," he sadly confessed; "the lukewarmness of its followers."

She felt a trace of compunction for him; but why had he gone into the ministry?

"Can you blame them?" she demanded, as much aggrieved as if she had suffered a personal distress. "Not so long ago, the governing body of the church held a convention in which the uppermost thought was this same luke-warmness. It was felt, and acknowledged, that the church was losing its personal hold on its membership, and that something should be done about it; yet that same body progressed no further in this problem than to realise that something should be done about it; and spent hours and hours wrangling over whether banana wine could be used for the sacrament in Uganda, where grapes do not grow, and where every bottle of grape wine carried over the desert represents the life of a man. Of what value is that to religion? How do you suppose Christ would have decided that question?"

The rector flushed as if he had been struck, and he turned to Gail with that cold look in his green eyes.

"That is too deep a subject to discuss here, but if you will permit me, I will take it up with you at the house," he quietly returned, and there was a dogged compulsion in his tone.

"I shall be highly interested in the defence," accepted Gail, with an aggravating smile.

There seemed to be but very little to say after that, and they walked silently up the hill together towards the yellow camp fire, fuming inwardly at each other. Near the top of the hill, her ermine scarf came loose at the throat, and, with her numbed hands, she could not locate the little clasp with which it had been held.

"May I help you?" offered the rector, constraining himself to politeness.

"Thank you." She was extremely sweet about it, and he reached up to perform the courtesy. The rounded column of her neck was white as marble in the moonlight, and, as he sought the clasps, his fingers, drawn from his woollen gloves, touched her warm throat, and they tingled. He started as if he had received an electric shock, and, as he looked into her eyes, a purple mist seemed to spring between them. He mechanically fastened the clasps, though his fingers trembled. "Thank you," again said Gail, and he did not notice that her voice was unusually low. She went on over to the group gathered around the fire, but the Reverend Smith Boyd stood where she had left him, staring stupidly at the ground. He was in a whirl of bewilderment, amid which there was some unreasoning resentment, but beneath it all there was an inexplicable sadness.

"Just in time for the Palisade Special, Gail," called Lucile Teasdale.

"I don't know," laughed Gail. "I think of going on a private car this trip," and she sought among the group for distraction from certain oppressive thought. Allison, and Lucile and Ted and Arly, were among the more familiar figures; besides were a cherub-cheeked young lady in a bear skin, to whom Ted Teasdale was pretending to pay assiduous attention; and the thoughtful Willis Cunningham; and Houston Van Ploon, who was a ruddy-faced young fellow with an English moustache, and a perpetual air of having just come from his tailor's; and a startling Adonis, with pink cheeks and a shining black goatee and a curly moustache, and large, round, black eyes, which were

deep, and full of almost anything one might wish to put into them. This astoundingly fascinating gentleman had been proudly introduced as Dick Rodley, by Arlene, early in the evening, with an air which plainly stated that he was a personal discovery for which she gave herself great credit. At present, however, he was warming the slender white hands of Lucile Teasdale. Now he sprang up and came towards Gail.

"The Palisade Special will not start without Miss Sargent," he declared, bending upon her an ardent gaze, and bestowing upon her a smile which displayed a flash of perfect white teeth.

Gail breathlessly thought him the most dangerously handsome thing she had ever seen, but she missed the foreign accent in him. That would have made him complete.

"I'm sorry that the Palisade Special will be delayed," she coolly told him, but she tempered the deliberateness of that decision with an upward and sidelong glance, which she was startled to recognise in herself as distinct coquetry. She concluded, however, on reflection, that this was only a just meed which no one could withhold from this resplendent creature.

"You haven't the heart to refuse," protested handsome Dick, coming nearer, and again smiling down at her.

"I have a prior claim," laughed Allison, stepping up and taking her by the arm. "It's my turn to guide Miss Sargent on the two-passenger sled."

There was something new about Allison to-night. There was the thrill and the exultation of youth in his voice, and twenty years seemed to have been dropped from his age. There was an intensity about him, too, and also a proprietor-like compulsion, which decided

Gail on a certain diversion she had entertained. She was oppressed with men to-night. The world was full of them, and they had closed too nearly around her.

Suddenly she broke away with a laugh, and, taking the two-passenger sled from Smith Boyd, who still stood in pre-occupation at the edge of the group, she picked it up and ran with it, and threw herself face forward on it, as she had done when she was a kiddy, and shot down the hill, to the intense disapproval of the Reverend Boyd! Dick Rodley, ever alert in his chosen profession, grabbed a light steel racer from the edge of the bank, and, with a magnificent run, slapped himself on the sled, and darted in pursuit! The rector's lip curled the barest trace at one corner, but Edward E. Allison, looking down the hill, grinned, and lit a cigar.

"Ted Teasdale, come right over here," ordered Lucile.

"Can't," carelessly returned Ted. "I'm having a serious flirtation with Miss Kenneth."

"You have to stop, and flirt with me," Lucile insisted, and going over, she slipped a hand within his sleeve, and passed the other arm affectionately around Marion Kenneth. "Gail stole the ornament."

"Serves you right," charged Arly Fosland. "You stole him from me. Come on, Houston, bring out the Palisade Special."

Houston Van Ploon, who was a brother to all ladies, obediently dragged forward the number two bob-sled, and set its nose at the brow of the hill, and the merry mob piled on.

"Coming Allison?" called Cunningham. "There's room for you both, Doctor."

"I don't think I'll ride this trip, thanks," returned

Allison, and, as the rector also declined with pleasant thanks, Allison gave the voyagers a hearty push, and walked back to the camp fire.

"I received the ultimatum of your vestry to-day, Doctor Boyd," observed Allison when they were alone. "Still that eventual fifty million."

"Well, yes," returned the rector briskly, and he backed up comfortably to the blaze. He was a different man now. "We discussed your proposition thoroughly, and decided that, in ten years, the property is worth fifty million to you, for the purpose you have in mind. Consequently why take less."

Allison surveyed him shrewdly for a moment.

"That's the argument of a bandit," he remarked. "Why accept all that the prisoner has when his friends can raise a little more?"

"I don't see the use of metaphor," retorted the rector, who dealt professionally in it. "Business is business."

Allison grunted, and flicked his ashes into the fire.

"By George, you're right," he agreed. "I've been trying to handle you like a church, but now I'm going after you like the business organisation you are."

The Reverend Smith Boyd reddened. The charge that Market Square Church was a remarkably lucrative enterprise was becoming too general for comfort.

"The vestry has given you their decision," he returned, standing stiff and straight, with his hands clasped behind him. "You may pay for the Vedder Court tenement property a cash sum which, in ten years, will accrue to fifty million dollars, or you may let it alone," and his tone was as forcefully crisp as Allison's, though he could not hide the musical timbre of it.

"I won't pay that price, and I won't let the property alone," Allison snapped back. "The city needs it."

For a moment the two men looked each other levelly in the eyes. There seemed to have sprang up some new enmity between them. A thick man with a stubby moustache came puffing up to the fire, and sat down on his sled with a thump.

"Splendid exercise," he gasped, holding his sides. "I think about a week of it would either reduce me to a living skeleton, or kill me."

"Your vestry's an ass," Allison took pleasure in informing him.

"Same to you and many of them," puffed Jim Sargent. "What's the trouble with you? Trying to take a business advantage of a church."

"I'd have a better chance with a Jew," was Allison's contemptuous reply.

"Oh, see here, Allison!" remonstrated Jim Sargent seriously. He even rose to his feet to make it more emphatic. "You mustn't treat Market Square Church with so much indignity."

"Why not? Market Square Church puts itself in a position to be considered in the light of any other grasping organisation."

The Reverend Smith Boyd, finding in himself the growth of a most uncloth-like anger, decided to walk away rather than suffer the aggravation which must ensue in this conversation. Consequently, he started down the hill, dragging Jim Sargent's sled behind him for company. There were no further insults to the church, however.

"Jim, what are the relations of the Towando Valley to the L. and C.?" asked Allison, offering Sargent a cigar.

"Largely paternal," and the president of the Towedo Valley grinned. "We feed it when it's good, and spank it when it cries."

"Hold control of the stock?"

"No, only its transportation," returned Sargent complacently.

"Stock is a good deal scattered, I suppose."

"Small holdings entirely, and none of the holders proud," replied Sargent. "It starts no place and comes right back, and the share-holders won't pay postage to send in their annual proxies."

"Then the stock doesn't seem to be worth buying," observed Allison, with vast apparent indifference.

"Only to piece out a collection," chuckled Sargent. "I didn't know you were interested in railroads."

"I wasn't a week ago," and Allison looked out across the starry sky to the tree-scalloped hills. "With the completion of the consolidation of New York's transportation system, and the building of a big central station, I thought I was through. It seemed a big achievement to gather all these lines to a common centre, like holding them in my hand; to converge four millions of people at one point, to handle them without confusion, and to re-distribute them along the same lines, looked like a life's work; but now I'm beginning to become ambitious."

"Oh, I see," grinned Jim Sargent. "You want to do something you can really call a job. If I remember rightly, you started with an equipment of four horse cars and two miles of rusted rail. What do you want to conquer next?"

Allison glanced down the hill, then back out across the starlit sky. Some new fervor had possessed him

to-night which made him a poet, and loosened the tongue which, previous to this, could almost calculate its utterances in percentage.

“The world,” he said.

CHAPTER V

EDWARD E. ALLISON TAKES A VACATION

EDWARD E. ALLISON walked into the offices of the Municipal Transportation Company at nine o'clock, and set his basket of opened and carefully annotated letters out of the mathematical centre of his desk; then he touched a button, and a thin young man, whose brow, at twenty, wore the traces of preternatural age, walked briskly in.

"Has Mr. Gregory arrived?"

The intensely earnest young man glanced at the clock.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"Take him these letters, and ask him if he will be kind enough to step here."

"Yes, sir," and the concentrated young man departed with the basket, feeling that he had quite capably borne his weight of responsibility.

Allison, looking particularly fresh and buoyant this morning, utilised his waiting time to the last fraction of a second. He put in a telephone call, and took from the drawer of his desk a packet of neatly docketed papers, an index memorandum book, a portfolio of sketches, and three cigars, the latter of which he put in his cigar case; then, his desk being empty, except for a clean memorandum pad and pencil, he closed it and locked it. The telephone girl reported his number on

the wire, and, the number proving to be that of a florist, he ordered some violets sent to Gail Sargent.

Gregory walked in, a fat man with no trace of nonsense about him.

"Out for the day, Ed?" he surmised, gauging that probability by the gift of the letters.

"A month or so," amended Allison, rising, and surveying the three articles on his desk calculatingly. "I'm going to take a vacation."

"It's about time," agreed his efficient general manager. "I think it's been four years since you stopped to take a breath. Going to play a little?"

"That's the word," and Allison chuckled like a boy. "Take care of these things," and tossing him the packet of papers and the memorandum book, he took the portfolio of sketches under his arm.

"I suppose we'll have your address," suggested Gregory.

"No."

Gregory pondered frowningly. He began to see a weight piling up on him, and, though he was capable, he loved his flesh.

"About that Shell Beach extension?" he inquired. "There's likely to be trouble with the village of Waveview. Their local franchises —"

"Settle it yourself," directed Allison carelessly, and Gregory stared. During the long and arduous course of Allison's climb, he had built his success on personal attention to detail. "Good-bye," and Allison walked out, lighting a cigar on his way to the door.

He stopped his runabout in front of a stationer's, and bought the largest globe they had in stock.

"Address, please?" asked the clerk, pencil poised over delivery slip.

"I'll take it with me," and Allison helped them secure the clumsy thing in the seat beside him. Then he streaked up the Avenue to the small and severely furnished house where four ebony servants protected him from the world.

"Out of town except to this list," he directed his kinky-haired old butler, and going into the heavy oak library, he closed the door. On the wall, depending from the roller case, was a huge map of the boroughs of New York, which had hung there since he had first begun to group transportation systems together. It was streaked and smudged with the marks of various coloured pencils, some faded and some fresh, and around one rectangle, lettered Vedder Court, was a heavy green mark. He picked up a pencil from the stand, but laid it down again with a smile. There was no need for that new red line; nor need, either, any longer, for the map itself; and he snapped it up into its case, on roller-springs stiff with disuse. In its place he drew down another one, a broad familiar domain between two oceans, and he smiled as his eye fell upon that tiny territory near the Atlantic, which, up to now, he had called a world, because he had mastered it.

His library phone rang.

"Mr. Allison?" a woman's voice. Gail Sargent, Mrs. Sargent, Mrs. Davies, or Lucile Teasdale. No other ladies were on his list. The voice was not that of Gail. "Are you busy to-night?" Oh, yes, Lucile Teasdale.

"Free as air," he gaily told her.

"I'm so glad," rattled Lucile. "Ted's just telephoned that he has tickets for 'The Lady's Maid.' Can you join us?"

"With pleasure." No hesitation whatever; prompt and agreeable; even pleased.

"That's jolly. I think six makes such a nice crowd. Besides you and ourselves, there'll be Arly and Dick Rodley and Gail." Gail, of course. He had known that. "We'll start from Uncle Jim's at eight o'clock."

Allison called old Ephraim.

"I want to begin dressing at seven-fifteen," he directed. "At three o'clock set some sandwiches inside the door. Have some fruit in my dressing-room."

He went back to his map, remembering Lucile with a retrospective smile. The last time he had seen that vivacious young person she had been emptying a box of almonds, at the side of the camp fire at the toboggan party. He jotted down a memorandum to send her some, and drew a high stool in front of the map.

Strange this new ambition which had come to him. Why, he had actually been about to consider his big work finished; and now, all at once, everything he had done seemed trivial. The eager desire of youth to achieve had come to him again, and the blood sang in his veins as he felt of his lusty strength. He was starting to build, with a youth's enthusiasm but with a man's experience, and with the momentum of success and the power of capital. Something had crystallised him in the past few days.

Across the fertile fields and the mighty mountains and the arid deserts of the United States, there angled four black threads, from coast to coast, and everywhere else were shorter main lines and shorter branches, and, last of all, mere fragments of railroads. He began with the long, angling threads, but he ended with the fragments, and these, in turns, he gave minute and careful study. At three o'clock he took a sandwich and



At 7:15 Ephraim found him at the end of the table in the midst
of some neat and intricate tabulations

ordered his car. He was gone less than an hour, and came back with an armload of books; government reports, volumes of statistics, and a file of more intimate information from the office of his broker. He threw off his coat when he came in this time, and spread, on the big, lion-clawed table at which Napoleon had once planned a campaign, a vari-coloured mass of railroad maps. At seven-fifteen old Ephraim found him at the end of the table in the midst of some neat and intricate tabulations.

"Time to dress, sir," suggested Ephraim.

Allison pushed to the floor the railroad map upon which he had been working, and pulled another one towards him. Ephraim waited one minute.

"I've run your tub, sir."

Allison leafed rapidly through the pages of an already hard-used book, to the section concerning the Indianapolis and St. Joe Railroad. Ephraim looked around calculatingly, and selected an old atlas from the top of the case near the door. He held it aloft an instant, and let it fall with a slam.

"Oh, it's you," remarked the absorbed Allison, glancing up.

"Yes, sir," returned Ephraim. "You told me to come for you at seven-fifteen."

Allison arose, and rubbed the tips of his fingers over his eyes.

"Keep this room locked," he ordered, and stalked obediently upstairs. For the next thirty minutes he belonged to Ephraim.

He was as carefree as a boy when he reached Jim Sargent's house, and his eyes snapped when he saw Gail come down the stairs, in a pearl tinted gown, with a triple string of pearls in her waving hair, and a rose-

coloured cloak depending from her gracefully sloping shoulders.

Her own eyes brightened at the sight of him. He had been much in her mind to-day; not singly but as one of a group. She was quite conscious that she liked him, but she was more conscious that she was curious about him. She was curious about most men, she suddenly found, comparing them, sorting them, weighing them; and Allison was one of the most perplexing specimens. A little heavy in his evening clothes, but not awkward, and not without dignity of bearing. He stepped forward to shake hands with her, and, for a moment, she found in her an inclination to cling to the warm thrill of his clasp. She had never before been so aware of anything like that. Nevertheless, when she had withdrawn her hand, she felt a sense of relief.

"Hello, Allison," called the hearty voice of Jim Sargent. "You're looking like a youngster to-night."

"I feel like one," replied Allison, smiling. "I'm on a vacation." He was either vain enough or curious enough to glance at himself in the big mirror as he passed it. He did look younger; astonishingly so; and he had about him a quality of lightness which made him restless. He had been noted among his business associates for a certain dry wit, scathing, satirical, relentless; now he used that quality agreeably, and when Lucile and Ted, and Arly and Dick Rodley joined them, he was quite easily a sharer in the gaiety. At the theatre he was the same. He participated in all the repartee during the intermissions, and the fact that he found Gail studying him, now and then, only gave him an added impulse. He was frank with himself about Gail. He wanted her, and he had made up his mind to have her. He was himself a little surprised at his own

capacity of entertainment, and when he parted from Gail at the Sargent house, he left her smiling, and with a softer look in her eyes than he had yet seen there.

Immediately on his return to his library, Allison threw off his coat and waistcoat, collar and tie, and sat at the table.

"What is there in the ice box?" he wanted to know.

"Well, sir," enumerated Ephraim carefully; "Mirandy had a chicken pot-pie for dinner, and then there's —"

"That will do; cold," interrupted Allison. "Bring it here with as few service things as possible, a bottle of Vichy and some olives."

He began to set down some figures, and when Ephraim came, shaking his head to himself about such things as cold dumplings at night, Allison stopped for ten minutes, and lunched with apparent relish. At seven-thirty he called Ephraim and ordered a cold plunge and some breakfast. He had been up all night, and on the map of the United States there were pencilled two thin straight black lines; one from New York to Chicago, and one from Chicago to San Francisco. Crossing them, and paralleling them, and angling in their general direction, but quite close to them in the main, were lines of blue and lines of green and lines of orange; these three.

Another day and another night he spent with his maps, and his books, and his figures; then he went to his broker with a list of railroads.

"Get me what stock you can of these," he directed. "Pick it up as quietly as possible."

The broker looked them over and elevated his eyebrows. There was not a road in the list which was

important strategically, but he had ceased to ask questions of Edward Allison.

Three days later, Allison went into the annual stockholders' meeting of the L. and C. Railroad, and registered majority of the stock in that insignificant line, which ran up the shore opposite Crescent Island, joined the Towando Valley shortly after its emergence from its hired entrance into New York, ran for fifty miles over the roadway of the Towando, with which it had a long-time tracking contract, and wandered up into the country, where it served as an outlet to certain conservatively profitable territory.

The secretary of the L. and C., a man of thick spectacles and a hundred wrinkles, looked up with fear in his eyes as his cramped old fingers clutched his pen.

"I suppose you'll be making some important changes, Mr. Allison," he quavered.

"Not in the active officers," returned Allison with a smile, and the president, who wore flowing side-whiskers, came over to shake hands with him. "How soon can you call the meeting?"

"Almost immediately," replied the president. "I suppose there'll be a change in policies."

"Not at all," Allison reassured him, and walked into the board room, where less than a dozen stockholders, as old and decrepit as the road itself, had congregated.

The president, following him, invited him to a seat next his own chair, and laid before him a little slip of paper.

"This is the official slate which had been prepared," he explained, with a smile which it took some bravery to produce.

"It's perfectly satisfactory," pronounced Allison, glancing at it courteously, and the elderly stockhold-

ers, knotted in little anxious groups, took a certain amount of reassurance from the change of expression on the president's face.

The president reached for his gavel and called the meeting. The stockholders, grey and grave, and some with watery eyes, drew up their chairs to the long table; for they were directors, too. They answered to their names, and they listened to the minutes, and waded mechanically through the routine business, always with their gaze straying to the new force which had come among them. Every man there knew all about Edward E. Allison. He had combined the traction interests of New York by methods as logical and unsympathetic as geometry, and where he appeared, no matter how pacific his avowed intentions, there were certain to be radical upheavings.

Election of officers was reached in the routine, and again that solemn inquiry in the faded eyes. The "official slate" was proposed in nomination. Edward E. Allison voted with the rest. Every director was re-elected!

New business. Again the solemn inquiry.

"Move to amend Article Three Section One of the constitution, relating to duration of office," announced Allison, passing the written motion to the secretary. "On a call from the majority of stock, the stockholders of the L. and C. Railroad have a right to demand a special meeting, on one week's notice, for the purpose of re-organisation and re-election."

They knew it. It had to come. However, three men on the board had long held the opinion that any change was for the better, and one of these, a thin, old man with a nose so blue that it looked as if it had been dyed to match his necktie, immediately seconded,

Edward E. Allison waited just long enough to vote his majority stock, and left the meeting in a hurry, for he had an engagement to take tea with Gail Sargent.

He allowed himself four hours for sleep that night, and the next afternoon headed for Denver. On the way he studied maps again, but the one to which he paid most attention was a new one drawn by himself, on which the various ranges of the Rocky Mountains were represented by scrawled, lead-pencilled spirals. Right where his thin line crossed these spirals at a converging point, was Yando Chasm, a pass created by nature, which was the proud possession of the Inland Pacific, now the most prosperous and direct of all the Pacific systems; and the Inland, with an insolent pride in the natural fortune which had been found for it by the cleverest of all engineers, guarded its precious right of way as no jewel was ever protected. Just east of Yando Chasm there crossed a little "one-horse" railroad, which, starting at the important city of Silverknob, served some good mining towns below the Inland's line, and on the north side curved up and around through the mountains, rambling wherever there was freight or passengers to be carried, and ending on the other side of the range at Nugget City, only twenty miles north of the Inland's main line, and a hundred miles west, into the fair country which sloped down to the Pacific. This road, which had its headquarters in Denver, was called the Silverknob and Nugget City; and into its meeting walked Allison, with control.

His course here was different from that in Jersey City. He ousted every director on the board, and elected men of his own. Immediately after, in the directors' meeting, he elected himself president, and, kindly consenting to talk with the reporters of the

Denver newspapers, hurried back to Chicago, where he drove directly to the head offices of the Inland Pacific.

"I've just secured control of the Silverknob and Nugget City," he informed the general manager of the Inland.

"So I noticed," returned Wilcox, who was a young man of fifty and wore picturesque velvet hats. "The papers here made quite a sensation of your going into railroading.

"They're welcome," grinned Allison. "Say Wilcox, if you'll build a branch from Pines to Nugget City, we'll give you our Nugget City freight where we cross, at Copperville, east of the range."

Wilcox headed for his map.

"What's the distance?" he inquired.

"Twenty-two miles; fairly level grade, and one bridge."

"Couldn't think of it," decided Wilcox, looking at the map. "We'd like to have your freight, for there's a lot of traffic between Silverknob and Nugget City, but it's not our territory. The smelters are at Silverknob, and they ship east over the White Range Line. Anyway, why do you want to take away the haulage from your northern branch?"

"Figure on discontinuing it. The grades are steep, the local traffic is light, and the roadbed is in a rotten condition. It needs rebuilding throughout. I'll make you another proposition. I'll build the line from Pines to Nugget City myself, if you'll give us track connection at Copperville and at Pines, and will give us a traffic contract for our own rolling stock on a reasonable basis."

Again Wilcox looked at the map. The Silverknob and Nugget City road began nowhere and ran nowhere,

so far as the larger transportation world was concerned, and it could never figure as a competitor. The hundred miles through the precious natural pass known as Yando Chasm, was not so busy a stretch of road as it was important, and the revenue from the passage of the Silverknob and Nugget City's trains would deduct considerably from the expense of maintaining that much-prized key to the golden west.

"I'll take it up with Priestly and Gorman," promised Wilcox.

"How soon can you let me know?"

"Monday."

That afternoon saw Allison headed back for New York, and the next morning he popped into the offices of the Pacific Slope and Puget Sound, where he secured a rental privilege to run the trains of the Orange Valley Road into San Francisco, and down to Los Angeles, over the tracks of the P. S. and P. S. The Orange Valley was a little, blind pocket of a road, which made a juncture with the P. S. and P. S. just a short haul above San Francisco, and it ran up into a rich fruit country, but its terminus was far, far away from any possible connection with a northwestern competitor; and that bargain was easy.

That night, Allison, glowing with an exultation which erased his fatigue, dressed to call on Gail Sargent.

CHAPTER VI

THE IMPULSIVE YOUNG MAN FROM HOME

MUSIC resounded in the parlours of Jim Sargent's house; music so sweet and compelling in its harmony that Aunt Grace slipped to the head of the stairs, to listen in mingled ecstasy and pride. Up through the hallway floated a clear, mellow soprano and a rich, deep baritone, blended so perfectly that they seemed twin tones. Aunt Grace, drawn by a fascination she could not resist, crept down to where she could see the source of the melody. Gail, exceptionally pretty to-night in her simple little dove-coloured gown with its one pink rose, sat at the piano, while towering above her, with his chest expanded and a look of perfect peace on his face, stood the Reverend Smith Boyd.

Enraptured, Aunt Grace stood and listened until the close of the ballad. Leafing through her music for the next treat, Gail looked up at the young rector, and made some smiling remark. Her shining brown hair, waving about her forehead, was caught up in a simple knot at the back, and the delicate colour of her cheeks was like the fresh glow of dawn. The Reverend Smith Boyd bent slightly to answer, and he, too, smiled as he spoke; but as he happened to find himself gazing deep into the brown eyes of Gail, the smile began to fade, and Aunt Grace Sargent, scared, ran back up the stairs and into her own room, where she

took a book, and held it in her lap, upside down. The remark which Gail had made was this:

"You should have used your voice professionally."

The reply of the rector was:

"I do."

"I didn't mean oratorically," she laughed, then returned nervously to her search for the next selection. She had seen that change in his smile. "It is so rare to find a perfect speaking voice coupled with a perfect singing voice," she rattled on. "Here's that simple little May Song. Just harmony, that's all."

Once more their voices rose in that perfect blending which is the most delicate of all exhilarations. In the melody itself there was an appealing sympathy, and, in that moment, these two were in as perfect accord as their voices. There is something in the music of the human tone which exerts a magnetic attraction like no other in the world; which breaks down the barriers of antagonism, which sweeps away the walls of self entrenchment, which attracts and draws, which explains and does away with explanation. This was the first hour they had spent without a clash, and the Reverend Smith Boyd, his eyes quite blue to-night, brought another stack of music from the rack.

The butler, an aggravating image with only one joint in his body, paraded solemnly through the hall, and back again with the card tray, while Gail and the rector sang "Juanita" from an old college song book, which the Reverend Boyd had discovered in high glee. Aunt Grace came down the stairs and out past the doors of the music salon. There were voices of animated greeting in the hall, and Auntie returned to the door just as the rector was spreading open the book at "Sweet and Low."

"Pardon me," beamed Aunty. "There's a little surprise out here for you."

"For me?" and Gail rose, with a smile and a pretty little nod of apology.

She moved with swiftly quiet grace into the hall. There was a little half shrieking exclamation. The rector, setting a chair smilingly for Mrs. Sargent, happened, quite unwittingly, to come in range of the hall mirror at the moment of the half shriek, and he saw an impulsive young man grab Gail Sargent in his arms, and kiss her!

"Howard!" protested Gail, in the midst of embarrassed laughter; and presently she came in, rosy-cheeked, with the impulsive young man, whose hair was inclined to thinness in front. He was rather good looking, on second inspection, with a sharp eye and a brisk manner and a healthy complexion.

"Mr. Clemmens, Doctor Boyd," introduced Gail, and there was the ring of genuine pleasure in her voice. "Mr. Clemmens is one of my very best friends from back home," and she viewed this one of her very best friends with pride as he shook hands with the Reverend Smith Boyd. He was easy of manner, was Mr. Clemmens, even confident, though he had scarcely the ease which does not need self assertion.

"I am delighted to meet any friend of Miss Sargent," admitted the rector, in that flowing, mellow baritone which no one heard for the first time without surprise.

"Allow me to say the same," returned the young man from back home, making a critical and jealous inspection of the disturbingly commanding rector. His voice was brisk, staccato, and a trifle high pitched. Gail had always admired it, not for its musical

quality, of course, but for its clean-cut decisiveness.

"When did you arrive?" asked Mrs. Sargent, with hospitable interest.

"Just this minute," stated Clemmens, exchanging a glance of pleasure with Gail. "I only stopped at the hotel long enough to throw in my luggage, and drove straight on here." He turned to her so expectantly that the rector rose.

"You're not going?" protested Gail, and was startled to find that the Reverend Smith Boyd's eyes were no longer blue. They were cold.

"I'm afraid that I must," he answered her in the conventional apologetic tone, which was not at all like his singing voice. It sounded rather inflexible, and as if it might not blend very well. "I trust that I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again, Mr. Clemmens," and he shook hands with the brisk young man in a most dignified fashion. He bowed his frigid adieus to the ladies, and marched into the hall for his hat.

"Rector?" guessed Mr. Clemmens, when the outer door had closed.

"Of Market Square Church," proudly asserted Aunt Grace. "He is a wonderfully gifted young man. The rectory is right next door."

"Oh yes," responded Mr. Clemmens perfunctorily, and he turned slowly to Gail. "Fine looking chap, isn't he?"

Gail bridled a trifle. She knew that trick of jealous interrogation quite well. Howard was trying to surprise her into some facial expression which would betray her attitude toward the Reverend Smith Boyd.

"He's perfectly splendid!" she beamed. "He has the richest baritone I've ever heard."

"It blends so perfectly with Gail's," supplemented the admiring Aunt Grace. "We must have him over so you may hear them sing."

"I'll be delighted," lied Mr. Clemmens, shooting another glance of displeasure at Gail.

Somehow, Aunt Grace felt that there was an atmosphere of discomfort in the room, and she thought she had better go upstairs, to worry about it.

"You'll take dinner with us to-morrow evening, I hope," she cordially invited.

"You won't have to ask me twice," laughed Mr. Clemmens, rising because Aunt Grace did. He was always punctilious, and the manner of his courtesies showed that he was punctilious.

"Well, girl, tell me all about it," heartily began the young man from home, when Auntie had made her apologies and her departure. He imprisoned her hand in his, and seated her on the couch, and sat beside her, crossing his legs comfortably.

"I've been having a delightful time," replied Gail. "Suppose we go over to the blue room, Howard. It's much more pleasant, I think." She wanted to be away from the piano. It distressed her.

"All right," cheerfully acquiesced Howard, and, still retaining her hand, he went over with her into the blue room, and seated her on the couch, and sat beside her, and crossed his legs. "We made up our monthly report just before I came. Our rate of increase is over ten per cent. better than in any previous month since we began. Three more years, and we'll have the biggest insurance business in the state; that is, except the big outside companies."

"Isn't that splendid!" and her enthusiasm was fine to see. She had been kept posted on the progress of

the Midwest Mutual Insurance Company since its inception, and naturally she was very much interested. "Then you'll branch out into other states."

"Not for ten years to come," he told her, smiling at her woman-like over-estimate. "The Midwest won't do that until we've covered the home territory so thoroughly that there'll be no chance of further expansion. My board of directors brought up that matter at the last meeting, but I turned it down flat-footed. I'm enterprising enough, but I'm thorough. The president has thrown the entire responsibility on my shoulders, and I won't take any foolish risks."

Gail turned to him in clear-eyed speculation.

"If I were a man, I'm afraid I'd be a business gambler," she mused.

"I've no doubt you would," he comfortably laughed. "However, my method is the safest. Ten years from now, Gail, I'll have money that I made myself, and, in twenty, I'll be shamelessly rich. Sounds good, doesn't it?"

"You have enough money now, if that's all you want," she reminded him.

"No, I'm ambitious," he insisted. "Not for myself, though. Gail, you know why I made this trip," and he bent closer to her. His staccato voice softened and his eyes were very earnest. "I couldn't stay away." He clasped his other hand over hers, and drew closer.

"I told you you mustn't, Howard," she gently chided him, though she made no attempt to withdraw her hand. "I'm not ready yet to decide about things."

He was a poor psychologist.

"All right," he cheerfully assented, dropping the earnestness from his voice and from his eyes, but re-

taining her hand. His clasp was warm and strong and wholesome. "Mrs. King's ball was rather a tame affair this year, though I may have been prejudiced because you weren't there."

He drifted easily into chat of home people and affairs, and she felt more and more contented every minute. After all, he was of her own people, linked to them and to her. It was comfortable to be with some one whom one thoroughly understood. There was no recess of his mind with which she was not intimately acquainted. She could foretell his mental processes as easily as she could read the time on her watch. It was tremendously restful, after her contact with the stronger personalities which she had found here. She had been wondering in what indefinable manner Howard had changed, but now she began to see that it was she who had shifted her viewpoint. The men she had met here, with the exception of such as Van Ploon and Cunningham and Ted Teasdale, were far more complex than Howard, a quality which at times might be more interesting than agreeable.

A rush of noise filled the hall. Lucile and Ted Teasdale, handsome Dick Rodley and Arly Fosland and Houston Van Ploon, had come clattering in as an escort for Mrs. Davies, whose pet fad was to have as many young people as possible bring her home from any place.

The young man from back home took his plunge into that vortex with becoming steadiness. Gail had looked to see him a trifle bewildered, and would have had small criticism for him if he had, but he greeted them all on a friendly basis, and, sitting down again beside her, crossed his legs, while Mrs. Davies calmly lorgnetted him.

"Where's the baby?" demanded handsome Dick Rodley, heading for the stairs.

"Silly, you mustn't!" cried Lucile, and started after him. "Flakes should be asleep at this hour."

"I came in for the sole purpose of teaching Flakes the turkey trot," declared handsome Dick, and ran away, followed by Lucile.

"Lucile's becoming passé," criticised Ted. "She's flirting with Rodley for the second time."

"Can you blame her?" defended Arly, stealing a surreptitious glance at the young man from back home, then the devil of mischief seized her and she leaned forward. "Do you flirt, Mr. Clemmens?"

For once the easy assurance of Howard left him, and he blushed. The stiff, but kindly disposed Van Ploon came to his rescue.

"Perhaps Mr. Clemmens is not yet married," he suggested.

To save him, Clemmens, used, under any circumstances, to the easy sang froid of the insurance business, could not keep himself from turning to Gail with accusing horror in his eyes. Was this the sort of company she kept? He glanced over at Arly Fosland. She was sitting in the deep corner of her favourite couch, nursing a slender ankle, and even her shining black hair, to say nothing of her shining black eyes, seemed to be snapping with wicked delight. It was so unusual to find a young man one could shock.

Lucile and handsome Dick came struggling down the stairway with Flakes between them, and Gail sprang instantly to take the bewildered puppy from them both. Little blonde Lucile gave up her interest to the prior right, but Rodley pretended to be obstinate about it. His deep eyes burned down into Gail's, as he stood

bending above her, and his smile, to Howard's concentrated gaze, had in it that dangerous fascination which few women could resist! Gail was positively smiling up into his eyes!

"Tableau!" called Ted. "All ready for the next reel."

"Hold it a while," begged Arly, and even the young man from home was forced to admit that the picture was handsome enough to be retained. The Adonis-like Dick, with his black hair and black eyes, his curly black moustache and his black goatee, his pink cheeks and his white teeth; Gail, gracefully erect, her head thrown back, her brown hair waving and her eyes dancing; the Adonis bending over her and the fluffy white Flakes between them; it was painfully beautiful; and Mr. Clemmens suddenly regretted his square-toed shoes and his business suit.

"Children, go home," suddenly commanded Mrs. Davies. "Dick, put the dog back where you found it."

"I suppose we'll have to go home," drawled Ted. "Dick, put back that dog."

"Put away the dog, Dick," ordered the heavier voice of young Van Ploon. "Come along, Gail, I'll put him away."

At his approach, Dick placed the puppy, with great care, in Gail's charge, and took her arm. Van Ploon took her other arm, and together the trio, laughing, went away to return Flakes to his bed. They clung to her most affectionately, bending over her on either side; and they called her Gail!

The others were ready to go when they returned from the collie nursery, and the three young men stood for a moment in a row near the door. Gail looked

them over with a puzzled expression. What was there about them which was so attractive? Was it poise, sureness, polish, breeding, experience, insolence, grooming — what? Even the stiff Van Ploon seemed smooth of bearing to-night!

“Come home, Gail,” begged Clemmens, when the noisy party had laughed its way out of the door and Aunt Helen Davies had gone upstairs.

She knew what was in his mind, but compassion overcame her resentment, because there was suffering in his voice and in his eyes. She smiled on him forgivingly, and did not withdraw the hand he took again.

“New York’s an evil place,” he urged. “Who are these friends of yours?” and he looked at her accusingly.

“Why, they are tremendously nice people, Howard,” she told him, forgiving him again because he did not understand. “Lucile is the pretty cousin about whom I wrote you, Ted is her husband, and the others are their friends.”

“I don’t like them,” he rather sternly said. “They are not fit company for you. They see no sacredness in marriage, with their open flirting.”

“Why, Howard, that’s only a joke. Ted and Lucile are exceptionally devoted to each other.” She turned and studied him seriously. Was he smaller of stature than he had seemed back home, or what was it?

They still were standing in the hall, and the front door opened.

“Brought you a prodigal,” hailed Uncle Jim, slipping his latchkey in his pocket as he held the door open for the prodigal in question. “Hello, Clemmens. When did you blow in?” and he advanced to shake hands.

Gail was watching the doorway. Some one outside was vigorously stamping his feet. The prodigal came in, and proved to be Allison, buoyant of step, sparkling of eye, firm of jaw, and ruddy from the night wind. Smiling with the sureness of welcome, he came eagerly up to Gail, and took her hand, retaining it until she felt compelled to withdraw it, recognising again that thrill. The barest trace of a flush came into her cheeks, and paled again.

“Allison, meet one of Chubsy’s friends from home,” called Uncle Jim. “Mr. Allison, Mr. Clemmens.”

As the two shook hands, Gail turned again to the young man from back home. Yes, he had grown smaller.

CHAPTER VII

THEY HAD ALREADY SPOILED HER!

GAIL faltered when, after bidding good-night to her uncle and to Allison, she turned and met the look in Howard Clemmens' eyes. She knew that the inevitable moment had arrived. He walked straight up to her, and there was a new dignity in him, a new strength, a new resolve. For a moment, as he advanced, she thought that he was about to put his arms around her, but he did not. Instead, he took her hand, in his old characteristic way, and led her into the library, and seated her on the couch, and sat beside her.

"Gail, come home with me," he said, authoritative but kind. He had been her recognised suitor from childhood. He had shut out all the other boys.

She withdrew her hand, but without deliberate intent. She had felt the instinctive and imperative need of touching her two hands together in her lap.

"You're asking something impossible, Howard," she returned, quietly. Her voice was low, and her beautiful brown eyes, half veiled by their long lashes, were watching the play of light in a ruby on one of her fingers. She was deep in abstracted thought, struggling vaguely with problems which he could not know, and of which she herself was as yet but dimly conscious.

"Come home, and marry me." Perfectly patient, perfectly confident, perfectly gentle. He reached for her hand again, and took them both, still clasped, in his

own. "Gail, we've waited quite long enough. It's not doing either one of us any good for you to be here. The best thing is for us to be married right now."

For the first time she turned her eyes full upon him.

"You are taking a great deal for granted, Howard," and she wore a calm decision which he had not before seen in her. "There has never been any agreement between us."

"There has been an understanding," he retorted, releasing her unresponsive hands and looking her squarely in the eyes, with a slight frown on his brow.

"Never," she incisively reminded him, and her piquant chin pointed upwards. "I've always told you that I could make no promises."

That came as a shock and a surprise. It could not be possible that she did not care for him!

"Why, Gail dear, I love you!" he suddenly told her, with more fervour than she had ever heard in his tone. He slipped from the edge of the couch to his knee on the floor, where he could look up into her downcast eyes. He put his arm around her, and drew her closer. He clasped her hands in his own strong palm. "Listen, Gail dear; we grew up together." He was tender now, tender and pleading, and his voice had in it ranges of modulation which it had never developed before this night. "You were my very first sweetheart; and the only one. Even as a boy in school, when you were only a little kiddie, I made up my mind to marry you, and I've never given up that dream. All my life I've loved you, stronger and deeper as the years went on, until now the love that is in me sways every thought, every action, every emotion. I love you, Gail dear! All my heart and all my soul is in it."

She had not drawn away from his embrace, she had

not removed her hands from his clasp; instead, she had yielded somewhat towards this old friend.

"I can't do without you any longer, Gail!" he impetuously went on, detecting that yielding in her. "You must marry me! Tell me that you will!"

She disengaged herself from him very gently.

"I can't, Howard." Her voice was so low that he could scarcely catch the words, and her face was filled with sorrow.

He held tense and rigid where she had left him.

"You can't," he repeated, numbly.

"It is impossible," and her face cleared of all its perplexity. She was grave, and serious, and saddened; but still sure. "For the first time I know my own mind clearly, and I know that I do not now, and never can, care for you in the way you wish."

He rose abruptly and stood before her. His brows were knotted, and there was a hard look on his face.

"I came too late!" he bitterly charged. "They've already spoiled you!"

Gail sprang from the couch, and a round red spot flashed into each cheek. She had never looked so beautiful as when she stood before him, her tiny fists clenched and her eyes blazing. She almost replied to him, then she rang the bell for the butler, and hurried upstairs. Wild as was her tumult, she stood with her hand on the knob of her dressing-room until she heard the front door open and close; then she ran in and threw herself downward on the chintz-covered divan, and cried!

She sat up presently, and remembered that the dove-coloured gown was her pet. With a quite characteristic ability of self-segregation, she put out of her mind, except for the dull ache of it, the tangled vortex of distress until she had changed her garments and let down

her waving hair, and, disdaining the help of her maid, performed all the little nightly duties, to the putting away of her clothing. Then, in a perfectly neat and orderly boudoir, she sat down to take herself seriously in hand.

First of all, there was Howard. She must cleanse her conscience of him for all time to come. In just how far had she encouraged him; in how far was he justified in assuming there to be an "understanding" between them? It was true that they had grown up together. It was true that, from the first moment she had begun to be entertained by young men, she had permitted him to be her most frequent escort. She had liked him better than all the others; had trusted him, relied on him, commanded him. Perhaps she had been selfish in that; but no, she had given at least as much pleasure as she had received in that companionship. More; for as her beauty had ripened with her years, Howard had been more and more exacting in his jealousy, in his claims upon her for the rights and the rewards of past service. Had she been guilty in submitting to this mild form of dictatorship, and, by permitting it, had she vested in him the right to expect it? Possibly. She set that weakness to one side, as a mark against her.

Then had come the age of ardour, when a more serious note crept into their relation. It was the natural end and aim of all girls to become married, and, as she blossomed into the full flower of her young womanhood, this end and aim had been constantly borne in on her by all her friends and relatives, by her parents, her girl chums, and by Howard. They had convinced her that this was the case, and, in consequence, the logical candidate was the young man who had expended all his time

and energy in trying to please her. How much of a debt was that? Well, it was an obligation, she gravely considered, with her dimpled chin in her hand. An obligation which should be repaid — with grateful friendship.

She was compelled to admit, being an honest and a just young person, that at various times she had herself considered Howard Clemmens the logical candidate. She must be married some time, and Howard was the most congenial young man of all her acquaintance. He was of an excellent family, had proved his right to exist by the fact that he had gone into business when he had plenty of money to live in idleness, was well-mannered, cheerful, good-natured, self-sacrificing, and an adorer whose admiration was consistent and unfaltering. Even — she confessed this to herself with self-resentment for having confessed it — even at the time she had left for New York, she had been fairly well settled in her mind that she would come back, and invite all her hosts of friends to see her marry Howard, and they would build a new house just the way she wanted it, and entertain, and some day she would be a prominent member of the Browning Circle.

However, she had never, by any single syllable, hinted to Howard, or any one else, that this might be the case, and her only fault could lie in thinking it. Now, just how far could Howard divine this mental attitude, and just how far might that mental attitude influence her actions and general bearing toward Howard, so that he might be justified in feeling that there was an actual understanding between them?

She did not know. She was only sure that she was perfectly miserable. She had yielded to a fit of impetuous anger, and had sent away her lifelong friend

without a word of good-bye, and he had been a dear, good fellow who had been ready to bark, or fetch and carry, or lie down and roll over, at the word of command; and they had been together so much, and he had always been so kind and considerate and generous, and he was from back home, and he did really and truly love her very much, and she was homesick; and she cried again.

She sat upright with a jerk, and dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief, which was composed of one square inch of linen entirely surrounded by embroidered holes. She had been perfectly right in sending Howard away without a good-bye. He had insulted her friends and her, most grossly; he had been nasty and unreasonable; he had been presumptuous and insolent; his voice was harsh and he had crossed his legs in a fashion which showed his square-toed shoe at an ugly angle. She had never seen anybody cross his legs in just that way. "They had spoiled her already!" Indeed! Why had she not waited long enough to assert herself? Why had she not told him what a conceited creature he was? Why had she not said all the hot, bitter, stinging things which had popped into her mind at the time? There were half a dozen better and more scornful ways in which she could have sent him away than by merely calling the butler and running upstairs. She might even have stretched out her hand imperiously and said "Go!" upon which thought she laughed at herself, and dabbed her eyes with that absurdity which she called a handkerchief.

There was knock at the door and, on invitation, the tall and stately Mrs. Helen Davies came in, frilled and ruffled for the night. She found the dainty, little guest boudoir in green tinted dimness. Gail had turned

down all the lights in the room except the green lamps under the canopy, and she sat on the divan, with her brown hair rippling about her shoulders, her knees clasped in her arms, and her dainty little boudoir slippers peeping from her flowing pink negligee, while the dim green light, suited to her present sombre reflections, only enhanced the clear pink of her complexion. Mrs. Davies sat down in front of her.

"Mr. Clemmens proposed to you to-night," she charged, gleaning that fact from experienced observation.

Gail nodded her head.

"I hope you did not accept him."

The brown ripples shook sideways.

"I was quite certain that you would not," and the older woman's tone was one of distinct relief. "In fact, I did not see how you could. The young man is in no degree a match for you."

There was a contemptuous disapproval in her tone which brought Gail's head up.

"You don't know Howard!" she flared. "He is one of the nicest young men at home. He is perfectly good and kind and dear, and I was hateful to him!" and Gail's chin quivered.

Aunt Helen rendered first aid to the injured in the tenderest of manners. She moved over to the other side of Gail where she could surround her, and laid the brown head on her shoulder.

"I know just how you feel," she soothingly said. "You've had to refuse to marry a good friend, and you are reproaching yourself because you were compelled to hurt him. Of course you are unfair to yourself, and you feel perfectly miserable, and you will for a while; but the main point is that you refused him."

Gail, whose quick intelligence no intonation escaped, lay comfortably on Aunt Helen's shoulder, and a clear little laugh rippled up. She could not see the smile of satisfaction and relief with which Aunt Helen Davies received that laugh.

"My dear, I am quite well pleased with you," went on the older woman. "If you handle all your affairs so sensibly, you have a brilliant future before you."

Gail's eyelids closed; the long, brown lashes curved down on her cheeks, revealing just a sparkle of brightness, while the mischievous little smile twitched at the corners of her lips.

"If you were an ordinary girl, I would urge you, to-night, to make a selection among the exceptionally excellent matrimonial material of which you have a choice, but, with your extraordinary talents and beauty, my advice is just to the contrary. You should delay until you have had a wider opportunity for judgment. You have not as yet shown any marked preference, I hope."

Gail's quite unreasoning impulse was to giggle, but she clothed her voice demurely.

"No, Aunt Helen."

"You are remarkably wise," complimented Aunt Helen, a bit of appreciation which quite checked Gail's impulse to giggle. "In the meantime, it is just as well to study your opportunities. Of course there's Dick Rodley, whom no one considers seriously, and Willis Cunningham, whose one and only drawback is such questionable health that he might persistently interfere with your social activities. Houston Van Ploon, I am frank to say, is the most eligible of all, and to have attracted his attention is a distinct triumph. Mr. Allison, while rather advanced in years —"

"Please!" cried Gail. "You'd think I was a horse."

"I know just how you feel," stated Aunt Helen, entirely unruffled; "but you have your future to consider, and I wish to invite your confidence," and in her voice there was the quaver of much concern.

"Thank you, Aunt Helen," said Gail, realising the sincerity of the older woman's intentions, and, putting her arms around Mrs. Davies' neck, she kissed her. "It is dear of you to take so much interest."

"I think it's pride," confessed Mrs. Davies, naïvely. "I won't keep you up a minute longer, Gail. Go to bed, and get all the sleep you can. Only sleep will keep those roses in your cheeks. Good-night," and with a parting caress, she went to her own room, with a sense of a duty well performed.

Gail smiled retrospectively, and tried the blue light under the canopy lamp, but turned it out immediately. The green gave a much better effect of moonlight on the floor.

She called herself back out of the mists of her previous distress. Who was this Gail, and what was she? There had come a new need in her, a new awakening. Something seemed to have changed in her, to have crystallised. Whatever this crystallisation was, it had made her know that she could not marry Howard Clemmens. It had made her know, too, that marriage was not to be looked upon as a mere inevitable social episode. Her thoughts flew back to Aunt Helen. Her eyelashes brushed her cheeks, and the little smile of sarcasm twitched the corners of her lips.

Aunt Helen's list of eligibles. Gail reviewed them now deliberately; not with the thought of the social advantages they might offer her, but as men. She reviewed others whom she had met. For the first time

in her life, she was frankly and self-consciously interested in men; curious about them. She had reached her third stage of development; the fairy prince age, the "I suppose I shall have to be married one day" age, and now the age of conscious awakening. She wondered, in some perplexity, as to what had brought about her nasence; rather, and she knitted her pretty brows, who had brought it about.

The library clock chimed the hour, and startled her out of her reverie. She turned on the lights, and sat in front of her mirror to give her hair one of those extra brushings for which it was so grateful, and which it repaid with so much beauty. She paused deliberately to study herself in the glass. Why, this was a new Gail, a more potent Gail. What was it Allison had said about her potentialities? Allison. Strong, forceful, aggressive Allison. He was potency itself. A thrill of his handclasp clung with her yet, and a slight flush crept into her cheeks.

Aunt Grace had worried about Jim's little cold, and the distant mouse she thought she heard, and the silver chest, and Lucile's dangerous looking new horse, until all these topics had failed, when she detected the unmistakable click of a switchbutton near by. It must be in Gail's suite. Hadn't the child retired yet? She lay quite still pondering that mighty question for ten minutes, and then, unable to rest any longer, she slipped out of bed and across the hall. There was no light coming from under the doors of either the boudoir or the bedroom, so Aunt Grace peeped into the latter apartment, then she tiptoed softly away. Gail, in her cascade of pink flufferies, was at the north window, kneeling, with her earnest face upturned to one bright pale star.

CHAPTER VIII

STILL PIECING OUT THE WORLD

THE map of the United States in Edward E. Allison's library began, now, to develop little streaks of red. They were not particularly long streaks, but they were boldly marked, and they hugged, with extraordinary closeness, the pencil mark which Allison had drawn from New York to Chicago and from Chicago to San Francisco. There were long gaps between them, but these did not seem to worry him very much. It was the little stretches, sometimes scarcely over an inch, which he drew with such evident pleasure from day to day, and now, occasionally, as he passed in and out, he stopped by the big globe and gave it a contemplative whirl. On the day he joined his far western group of little marks by bridging three small gaps, he received a caller in the person of a short, well-dressed, old man, who walked with a cane and looked half asleep, by reason of the many puffs which had piled up under his eyes and nearly closed them.

"I'm ready to wind up, Tim," remarked Allison, offering his caller a cigar, and lighting one himself. "When can we have that Vedder Court property condemned?"

"Whenever you give the word," reported Tim Corman, who spoke with an asthmatic voice, and with the quiet dignity of a man who had borne grave business responsibilities, and had borne them well.

Allison nodded his head in satisfaction.

"You're sure there can't be any hitch in it."

"Not if I say it's all right," and the words were Tim's only reproof. His tone was perfectly level, and there was no glint in his eyes. Offended dignity had nothing to do with business. "Give me one week's notice, and the Vedder Court property will be condemned for the city terminal of the Municipal Transportation Company. Appraisement, thirty-one million."

"I only wanted to be reassured," apologised Allison. "I took your word that you could swing it when I made my own gamble, but now I have to drag other people into it."

"That's right," agreed Tim. "I never get offended over straight business." In other times Tim Corman would have said "get sore," but, as he neared the end of his years of useful activity, he was making quite a specialty of refinement, and stocking a picture gallery, and becoming a connoisseur collector of rare old jewels. He dressed three times a day.

"How about the Crescent Island subway?"

"Ripe any time," and Tim Corman flicked the ashes from his cigar with a heavily gemmed hand. "The boosters have been working on it right along, but never too strong."

"There's no need for any particular manipulation in that," decided Allison, who knew the traction situation to the last nickel. "The city needs that outlet, and it needs the new territory which will be opened up. I think we'd better push the subway right on across to the mainland. The extension would have to be made in ten years anyhow."

"It's better right now," immediately assented Corman. In ten years he might be dead,

"I think, too, that we'd better provide for a heavy future expansion," went on Allison, glancing expectantly into Tim's old eyes. "We'd probably better provide for a double deck, eight track tube."

Tim Corman drew a wheezy breath, and then he grinned the senile shadow of his old-time grin; but it still had the same spirit.

"You got a hen on," he deduced. In "society," Tim could manage very nicely to use fashionable language, but, in business, he found it impossible after the third or fourth minute of conversation. He had taken in every detail of the room on his entrance, and his glance had strayed more than once to the red streaks on the big map. Now he approached it, and studied it with absorbed interest. "You're a smart boy, Ed," he concluded. "Across Crescent Island is the only leak where you could snake in a railroad. You found the only crack that the big systems haven't tied up."

"All you can get me to admit, just now, is that the city needs an eight-track tube across Crescent Island, under lease to the Municipal Transportation Company," stated Allison, smiling with gratification. A compliment of this sort from shrewd old Tim Corman, who was reputed to be the foxiest man in the world, was a tribute highly flattering.

"That's right," approved Tim. "All I know is a guess, and I don't tell guesses. This is a big job, though, Eddie. A subway to Crescent Island, under proper restrictions, is just an ordinary year's work for the boys, but this tube pokes its nose into Oakland Bay."

"I'm quite aware of the size of the job," chuckled Allison. "However, Tim, there'll be money enough behind this proposition to fill that tube with greenbacks."

Between the narrow-slitted and puffy eyelids of Tim Corman there gleamed a trace of the old-time genii.

"Then it's built." He rose and leaned on his cane, twinkling down on the man who, years before, he had picked as a "comer." "I've heard people say that money's wicked, but they never had any. When I die, and go down to the big ferry, if the Old Boy comes along and offers me enough money, I'll go to Hell."

Still laughing, Allison telephoned to the offices of the Midcontinent Railroad, and dashed out to his runabout just in time to see Tim Corman driving around the corner in his liveried landau. He found in President Urbank, of the Midcontinent, a spare man who had worn three vertical creases in his brow over one thwarted ambition. His rich but sprawling railroad system ran fairly straight after it was well started for Chicago, and fairly straight from that way-point until it became drunken with the monotony of the western foot-hills, where it gangled and angled its way to the far south and around up the Pacific coast, arriving there dusty and rattling, after a thousand mile detour from its course—but that road had no direct entrance into New York city. It approached from the north, and was compelled to circle completely around, over hired tracks, to gain a ferryboat entrance. Passengers inured to coming in over the Midcontinent, which was a well-equipped road otherwise, counted but half their journey done when they came in sight of New York, no matter from what distance they had come.

"Out marketing for railroads to-day, Gil?" suggested Allison.

"I don't know," smiled Urbank. "I might look at a few."

"Here they are," and Allison tossed him a memorandum slip.

Urbank glanced at the slip, then he looked up at Allison in perplexity. He had a funny forward angle to his neck when he was interested, and the creases in his brow were deepened until they looked like cuts.

"I thought you were joking, and I'm still charitable enough to think so. What's all this junk?"

"Little remnants and job lots of railroads I've been picking up," and Allison drew forward his chair. "Some I bought outright, and in some I hold control."

"If you're serious about interesting the Midcontinent in any of this property, we don't need to waste much time." Urbank leaned back and held his knee. "There are only two of these roads approach the Midcontinent system at any point, and they are useless property so far as we are concerned; the L. and C., in the east, and the Silverknob and Nugget City, in the west, which touches our White Range branch at its southern terminus. We couldn't do anything with those."

"You landed on the best ones right away," smiled Allison. "However, I don't propose to sell these to the Midcontinent. I propose to absorb the Midcontinent with them."

Urbank suddenly remembered Allison's traction history, and leaned forward to look at the job lots and remnants again.

"This list isn't complete," he judged, and turned to Allison with a serious question in his eye.

"Almost," and Allison hitched a little closer to the desk. "There remains an aggregate of three hundred and twenty miles of road to be built in four short

stretches. In addition to this, I have a twenty year contract over a hundred mile stretch of the Inland Pacific, a track right entry into San Francisco, and this," and he displayed to Urbank a preliminary copy of an ordinance, authorising the immediate building of an eight track tube through Crescent Island to the mainland. "Possibly you can understand this whole project better if I show you a map," and he spread out his little pocket sketch.

If it had been possible to reverse the processes of time and worry and wearing concentration, President Urbank, of the Midcontinent, would have raised from his inspection of that map with a brow as smooth as a baby's. Instead, his lips went dry, as he craned forward his neck at that funny angle, and projected his chin with the foolish motion of a goose.

"A direct entrance right slam into the centre of New York!" he exclaimed, cracking all his knuckles violently one by one. "Vedder Court! Where's that?"

"That's the best part of the joke," exulted Allison, with no thought that Vedder Court was, at this present moment, church property. "It's just where you said; right slam in the centre of New York; and the building into which the Midcontinent will run its trains will be also the terminal building of every municipal transportation line in Manhattan! From my station platforms, passengers from Chicago or the Far West will step directly into subway, L., or trolley. When they come in over the line which is now the Midcontinent, they will be landed, not across the river, or in some side street, but right at their own doors, scattering from the Midcontinent terminal over a hundred traction lines!" His voice, which had begun in the mild

banter of a man passing an idle joke, had risen to a ring so triumphant that he was almost shouting.

"But — but — wait a minute!" Urbank protested. He was stuttering. "Where does the Midcontinent get to the Crescent Island tube?"

"Right here," and Allison pointed to his map. "You come out of the tube to the L. and C., which has a long-time tracking privilege over fifty miles of the Towando Valley, and terminates at Windfield. At Forgeson, however, just ten miles after the L. and L. leaves the Towando, that road —"

"Is crossed by our tracks!" Urbank eagerly interpreted. "The Midcontinent, after its direct exit, saves a seventy mile detour! Then it's a straight shoot for Chicago! Straight on again out west — Why, Allison, your route is almost as straight as an arrow! It will have a three hundred mile shorter haul than even the Inland Pacific! You'll put that road out of the business! You'll have the king of transcontinental lines, and none can ever be built that will save one kink!" His neck protruded still further from his collar as he bent over the map. "Here you split off from the Midcontinent's main line and utilise the White Range branch; from Silverknob — My God!" and his mouth dropped open. "Why — why — why, you cross the big range *over the Inland Pacific's own tracks!*" and his voice cracked.

Edward E. Allison, his vanity gratified to its very core, sat back comfortably, smiling and smoking, until Urbank awoke.

"I suppose we can come to some arrangement," he mildly suggested.

Urbank looked at him still in a daze for a moment,

and a trace of the creases came back into his brow, then they faded away.

“You figured all this out before you came to me,” he remarked. “On what terms do we get in?”

CHAPTER IX

THE MINE FOR THE GOLDEN ALTAR

VEDDER COURT was a very drunkard among tenement groups. Its decrepit old wooden buildings, as if weak-kneed from dissipation and senile decay, leaned against each other crookedly for support, and leered down, at the sodden swarms beneath, out of broken-paned windows which gave somehow a ludicrous effect of bleared eyes. A heartless civic impulse had once burdened them with fire escapes, and these, though they were comparatively new, had already partaken of the general decay, and looked, with their motley cluttering of old bedding, and nondescript garments hung out to dry, and various utensils of the kitchen and laundry, and various unclassified junk, as if they were a sort of foul, fungoid growth which had taken root from the unspeakable uncleanness within. There had once been a narrow strip of curbed soil in the centre of the street, where three long-since departed trees had given the quarter its name of "Court," but this space was now as bare and dry as the asphalt surrounding it, and, as it was too small even for the purpose of children at play, a wooden bench, upon which no one ever sat, as indeed why should they, had long ago been placed on it, to become loose-jointed and weather-splintered and rotted, like all the rest of the neighbourhood.

As for its tenants; they were exactly the sort of birds one might expect to find in such foul nests. They were of many nations, but of just two main varieties; stupid and squalid, or thin and furtive; but they were all dirty, and they bore, in their complexions, the poison of crowded breathing spaces, and bad sewerage, and unwholesome or insufficient food.

Into this mire, on a day when melting snow had fallen and made all underfoot a black, shining, oily, sticky canal, there drove an utterly out-of-place little electric coupé, set low, and its glistening plate glass windows hung with absurd little lace curtains held back by pink ribbon bows. At the wheel was the fresh-cheeked Gail Sargent, in a driving suit and hat and veil of brown, and with her was the twinkling-eyed Rufus Manning, whose white beard rippled down to his second waistcoat button. They drove slowly the length of the court and back again, the girl studying every detail with acute interest. They stopped in front of Temple Mission, which, with its ugly red and blue lettering nearly erased by years of monthly scrubblings, occupied an old store room once used as a saloon.

"So this is the chrysalis from which the butterfly cathedral is to emerge," commented Gail, as Manning held the door open for her, and before she rose she peered again around the uninviting "court," which not even the bright winter sunshine could relieve of its dinginess; rather, the sun made it only the more dismal by presenting the ugliness more in detail.

"This is the mine which produces the gold which is to gild the altar," assented Manning, studying the sidewalk. "I don't think you'd better come in here. You'll spoil your shoes."

"I want to see it all this time because I'm never coming back," insisted Gail, and placed one daintily shod foot on the step.

"Then I'll have to shame Sir Walter Raleigh," laughed the silvery-bearded Manning, and, to her gasping surprise, he caught her around the waist and lifted her across to the door, whereat several soiled urchins laughed, and one vinegary-faced old woman grinned, in horrible appreciation, and dropped Manning a familiarly respectful courtesy.

There was no one in the mission except a broad-shouldered man with a roughly hewn face, who ducked his head at Manning and touched his forefinger to the side of his head. He was placing huge soup kettles in their holes in the counter at the rear of the room, and Manning called attention to this.

"A practical mission," he explained. "We start in by saving the bodies."

"Do you get any further?" inquired Gail, glancing from the empty benches and the atrociously coloured "religious" pictures on the walls to the windows, past which eddied a mass of humanity all but submerged in hopelessness.

"Sometimes," replied Manning gravely. "I have seen a soul or two even here. It is because of these two or three possibilities that the mission is kept up. It might interest you to know that Market Square Church spends fifteen thousand dollars a year in charity relief in Vedder Court alone."

Gail's eyelids closed, her lashes curved on her cheeks for an instant, and the corners of her lips twitched.

"And how much a year does Market Square Church take out of Vedder Court?"

"I was waiting for that bit of impertinence,"

laughed Manning. "I shall be surprised at nothing you say since that first day when you characterised Market Square Church as a remarkably lucrative enterprise. Have you never felt any compunctions of conscience over that?"

"Not once," answered Gail promptly. She had started to seat herself on one of the empty benches, but had changed her mind. "If I had been given to any such self injustice, however, I should reproach myself now. I think Market Square Church not only commercial but criminal."

"I'll have to give your soul a chastisement," smiled Manning. "These people must live somewhere, and because Vedder Court, being church property, is exempt from taxation, they find cheaper rents here than anywhere in the city. If we were to put up improved buildings, I don't know where they would go, because we would be compelled to charge more rent."

"In order to make the same rate of profit," responded Gail. "Out of all this misery, Market Square Church is reaping a harvest rich enough to build a fifty million dollar cathedral, and I have sufficient disregard for the particular Deity under whom you do business, to feel sure that he would not destroy it by lightning. I want out of here."

"Frankly, so do I," admitted Manning; "although I'm ashamed of myself. It's all right for you, who are young, to be fastidious, but your Daddy Manning is coward enough to want to make his peace with Heaven, after a life which put a few blots on the book."

She looked at him speculatively for a moment, and then she laughed.

"You know, I don't believe that, Daddy Manning. You're an old fraud, who does good by stealth, in order

to gain the reputation of having been picturesquely wicked. Tell me why you belong to Market Square Church."

"Because it's so respectable," he twinkled down at her. "When an old sinner has lost every other claim to respectability, he has himself put on the vestry."

He dropped behind on their way to the door, to surreptitiously slip something, which looked like money, to the man with the roughly hewn countenance, and as he stood talking, the Reverend Smith Boyd came in, not quite breathlessly, but as if he had hurried.

"I knew you were here," he said, taking Gail's slender hand in his own; then his eyes turned cold.

"You recognised my pink ribbon bows," and she laughed up at him frankly. "You haven't been over to sing lately."

"No," he replied, seemingly blunt, because he could not say he had been too busy.

"Why?" this innocently round-eyed.

Even bluntness could not save him here.

"Will you be at home this evening?" he evaded, still with restraint.

"I'll have our music selected," and, in the very midst of her brightness, she was stopped by the sudden sombreness in the rector's eyes.

"Eight o'clock?"

"That will be quite agreeable."

Simple little conversation; quite trivial indeed, but it had been attended by much shifting thought. To begin with, the rector regretted the necessity of disapproving of a young lady so undeniably attractive. She was a pleasure to the eye and a stimulus to the mind, and always his first impulse when he thought of her

was one of pleasure, but in the very moment of taking her hand, he saw again that picture of Gail, clasped in the arms of the impulsive young man from home. That picture had made it distasteful for him to call and sing. He had *not* been too busy! Another incident flashed back to him. The night of the toboggan party, when she had stood with her face upturned, and the moonlight gleaming on her round white throat. He had trembled, much to his later sorrow, as he fastened the scarf about her warm neck. However, she was the visiting niece of one of his vestrymen, who lived next door to the rectory. She was particularly charming in this outfit of brown, which enhanced so much her rich tints.

Gail jerked her pretty head impatiently. If the Reverend Smith Boyd meant to be as sombre as this, she'd rather he'd stay at home. He was dreadfully gloomy at times; though she was compelled to admit that he was good-looking, in a manly sort of way, and had a glorious voice and a stimulating mind. She invariably recalled him with pleasure, but something about him aggravated her so. Strange about that quick withdrawal of his hand. It was almost rude. He had done the same thing at the toboggan party. He had fastened her scarf, and then he had jerked away his hands as if he were annoyed! However, he was the rector, and her Uncle Jim was a vestryman, and they lived right next door.

"You just escaped a blowing up, Doctor Boyd," observed "Daddy" Manning, joining them, and his eyes twinkled from one to the other. "Our young friend from the west is harsh with the venerable Market Square Church."

"Again?" and the Reverend Smith Boyd was gra-

cious enough to smile. "What is the matter with it this time?"

"It is not only commercial, but criminal," repeated Manning, with a sly smile at Gail, who now wore a little red spot in each cheek.

"In what way?" and the rector turned to her severely.

"The mere fact that your question needs an answer is sufficient indication of the callousness of every one connected with Market Square Church," she promptly informed him. "That the church should permit a spot like this to exist, when it has the power to obliterate it, is unbelievable; but that it should make money from the condition is infamous!"

The Reverend Smith Boyd's cold eyes turned green, as he glared at this daring young person. In offending the dignity of Market Square Church she offended his own.

"What would you have us do?" he quietly asked.

"Retire from business," she informed him, nettled by the covert sneer at her youth and inexperience. She laid aside a new perplexity for future solution. In moments such as this the rector was far from ministerial, and he displayed a quickness to anger quite out of proportion to the apparent cause. "The whole trouble with Market Square Church, and of the churches throughout the world, is that they have no God. The Creator has been reduced to a formula."

Daddy Manning saved the rector the pain of any answer.

"You're a religious anarchist," he charged Gail.

Her face softened.

"By no means," she replied. "I am a devoted follower of the Divine Spirit, the Divine Will, the Divine

Law; but not of the church; for it has forgotten these things."

"You don't know what you are saying," the rector told her.

"That isn't all you mean," she retorted. "What you have in mind is that, being a woman, and young, I should be silent. You would not permit thought if you could avoid it, for when people begin to think, religion lives but the church dies; as it is doing to-day."

Now the Reverend Smith Boyd could be triumphant. There was a curl of sarcasm on his lips.

"Are you quite consistent?" he charged. "You have just been objecting to the prosperity of the church."

"Financially," she admitted; "but it is a spiritual bankrupt. Your financial prosperity is a direct sign of your religious decay. Your financial bankruptcy will come later, as it has done in France, as it is doing in Italy, as it will do all over the world. Humanity treats the church with the generosity due a once valuable servant who has out-lived his usefulness."

"My dear child, humanity can never do without religion," interposed Daddy Manning.

"Agreed," said Gail; "but it outgrows them. It outgrew paganism, idolatry, and a score of minor phases in between. Now it is outgrowing the religion of creed, in its progress toward morality. What we need is a new religion."

"You are blaming the church with a fault which lies in the people," protested the rector, shocked and disturbed, and yet feeling it his duty to set Gail right. He was ashamed of himself for having been severe with her in his mind. She was less frivolous than he had

thought, and what she needed was spiritual instruction. "The people are luke-warm."

"What else could they be with the watery spiritual gruel which the church provides?" retorted Gail. "You feed us discarded bugaboos, outworn tenets, meaningless forms and ceremonies. All the rest of the world progresses, but the church stands still. Once in a decade some sect patches its creed, and thinks it has been revolutionary, when in fact it has only caught up with a point which was passed by humanity at large, in its advancing intelligence, fifty years before."

"I am interested in knowing what your particular new religion would be like," remarked Daddy Manning, his twinkling eyes resting affectionately on her.

"It would be a return to the simple faith in God," Gail told him reverently. "It is still in the hearts of the people, as it will always be; but they have nowhere to gather together and worship."

Daddy Manning laughed as he detected that bit of sarcasm.

"According to that we are wasting our new cathedral."

"Absolutely!" and it struck the rector with pain that Gail had never looked more beautiful than now, with her cheeks flushed and her brown eyes snapping with indignation. "Your cathedral will be a monument, built out of the profits wrung from squalor, to the vanity of your congregation. If I were the dictator of this wonderful city of achievement, I would decree that cathedral never to be built, and Vedder Court to be utterly destroyed!"

"It is perhaps just as well that you are not the dictator of the city." The young Reverend Smith Boyd gazed down at her from his six feet of serious purpose,

with all his previous disapproval intensified. "The history of Market Square Church is rich with instances of its usefulness in both the spiritual and the material world, with evidence of its power for good, with justification for its existence, with reason for its acts. You make the common mistake of judging an entire body from one surface indication. Do you suppose there is no sincerity, no conscience, no consecration in Market Square Church?" His deep, mellow baritone vibrated with the defence of his purpose and that of the institution which he represented. "Why do you suppose our vestrymen, whose time is of enormous value, find a space amid their busy working hours for the affairs of Market Square Church? Why do you suppose the ladies of our guild, who have agreeable pursuits for every hour of the day, give their time to committee and charity work?" He paused for a hesitant moment. "Why do you suppose I am so eager for the building, on American soil, of the most magnificent house of worship in the world?"

Gail's pretty upper lip curled.

"Personal ambition!" she snapped, and, without waiting to see the pallor which struck his face to stone, she heeled her way out through the mud to her coupé.

CHAPTER X

THE STORM CENTRE OF MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

“**B**ROTHER BONES,” said Interlocutor Ted Teasdale commandingly, with his knuckles on his right knee and his elbow at the proper angle.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Interlocutor,” replied Willis Cunningham, whose “black-face makeup” seemed marvelously absurd in connection with his brown Vandyke.

“Brother Bones, when does everybody love a storm?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Interlocutor,” admitted Brother Bones Cunningham, touching his kinky wig with the tip of one forefinger. “When does everybody love a storm?”

Interlocutor Ted Teasdale roved his eye over the assemblage, of fifty or more, in his own ballroom, and smiled in a superior fashion. The ebony-faced semicircle of impromptu minstrels, banded together that morning, leaned forward with anticipatory grins. They had heard the joke in rehearsal. It was a corker!

“When it’s a Gail,” he replied, whereat Gail Sargent, at whom everybody looked and laughed, flushed prettily, and the bones and tambos made a flourish, and the Interlocutor announced that the Self Help Glee Club would now sing that entrancing ditty, entitled “Mary Had a Little Calf.”

It was only in the blossom of the evening at Ted Teasdale’s country house, the same being about eleven

o'clock, and the dance was still to begin. Lucile Teasdale's vivid idea for making her house-party notable was to induce their guests to amuse themselves; and their set had depended upon hired entertainers for so long that the idea had all the charm of distinct novelty. There had been an amazingly smart operetta written on the spot by Willis Cunningham, and with musical settings by Arlene Fosland. Rippingly clever thing! "The Tea Room Suffragettes!" Ball afterwards, of course, until four o'clock in the morning. To-night the minstrel show, and a ball; to-morrow night tableaux vivant, and a ball; fancy dress this time, and all costumes to be devised from the materials at hand by the wearer's own ingenuity. Fine? No end of it! One could always be sure of having a lively time around Lucile and Ted Teasdale and Arly Fosland. Gerald Fosland was at this party. Fine chap, Gerald, and beautifully decent in his attentions to Arly. Pity they were so rotten bored with each other; but there you were! Each should have married a blonde.

Gail Sargent fairly scintillated with enjoyment. She had never attended so brilliant a house-party. Her own set back home had a lot of fun, but this was in some way different. The people were no more clever, but there were more clever people among them; that was it. There had been a wider range from which to pick, which was why, in New York, there were so many circles, and circles within circles.

Gail was sparkling all the time. There was a constant flash of wit, not of a very high order, to be sure, nor exceptionally brilliant, which latter was its chief charm. Some wit has to be taken so very seriously. There were dashes into the brisk, exhilarating winter air, there were lazy breakfasts, where three or four of

the girls grouped in one room, there was endless gaiety and laughter, and, above all, oceans and oceans of flirtation. The men whom Lucile and Arly had collected were an especial joy. They had all the accomplished outward symbols of fervour without any of its oppressive insistence. Gail, as an agreeable duty to her new found self, experimented with several of them, and found them most amusing and pleasant, but nothing more disturbing.

Dick Rodley was the most persistent, and, in spite of the fact that he was so flawlessly handsome as to excite ridicule, Gail found herself, by and by, defending him against her own iconoclastic sense of humour. He reached her after the minstrel show, while Houston Van Ploon and Willis Cunningham were still struggling profanely with their burnt cork, and he stole her from under the very eyes of Jack Lariby, while that smitten youth was exchanging wit, at a tremendous loss, with caustic Arly Fosland.

"Have you seen the new century plant in the conservatory?" Dick asked, beaming down at her, his black eyes glowing like coals.

Gail's eyelids flashed down for an instant, and the corners of her lips twitched. Young Lariby had only been with her five minutes, but she had felt herself ageing in that time.

"I love them," she avowed, and glancing backward just once, she tiptoed hastily away with the delighted Dick. That young man had looked deep into the eyes of many women, and at last he was weary of being adored. He led Gail straight to the sequestered corner behind the date palms, but it was occupied by Bobby Chalmers and Flo Reynolds. He strolled with Gail to the seat behind the rose screen, but it was fully engaged,

and he led the way out toward the geranium alcove.

"I've missed you so this evening," he earnestly confided to her. "I was two hours in the minstrel show. It was forever, Gail!" and he bent his glowing eyes upon her. That was it! His wonderful eyes! They were magnetic, compelling, and one would be dull who could not find a response to the thrill of them.

"Where is the century plant?" He was a tremendously pleasant fellow. When she walked through a crowded room with Dick, she knew, from the looks of admiration, just what people were saying; that they were an extraordinarily handsome couple.

"There is no century plant," he shamelessly confessed.

"I knew it," and she laughed.

"I don't mind admitting that it was a point-blank lie," he cheerfully told her. "I wanted to get you out here alone, all to myself," and his voice went down two tones. He did do it so prettily!

"I've counted seven couples," she gaily responded.

He tightened his arm where her hand lay in it, and she left it there.

"You've clinched Lucile's reputation," he stated. "She always has been famous for picking good ones; but she saved you for the climax."

"My happy, happy childhood days," laughed Gail. "The boys used to talk that way on the way home from school."

"I don't doubt it," and Dick smiled appreciatively. "The dullest sort of a boy would find himself saying nice things to you; but I shall stop it."

"Oh, please don't!" begged Gail. "You are so delightful at it."

He pounced on a corner half hidden by a tub of

ferns. There was no bench there, but it was at least semi-isolated, and he leaned gracefully against the window-ledge, looking down at her earnestly as she stood, slenderly outlined against the green of the ferns, in her gown of delicate blue sparkling with opalescent flakes.

"That's just the trouble," he complained. "I don't wish you to be aware that I am saying what you call pretty things. I wish, instead, to be effective," and there was a roughness in his voice which had come for the first time. She was a trifle startled by it, and she lowered her eyes before the steady gaze which he poured down on her. Why, he was in earnest!

"Then take me to Lucile," she smiled up at him, and strolled in toward the ballroom.

Willis Cunningham met them at the door.

"You promised me the first dance," he breathlessly informed Gail. He had been walking rapidly.

"Are they ready?" she inquired, stepping a pace away from Dick.

"Well, the musicians are coming in," evaded Cunningham, tucking her hand in his arm.

"I've the second one, remember, Gail," Dick reminded her, as he glanced around the ballroom for his own partner, but Gail distinctly felt his eyes following her as she walked away with Cunningham.

"I know now of what your profile reminds me," Cunningham told her; "the Charmeaux 'Praying Nymph.' It is the most spiritually beautiful of all the pictures in the Louvre."

"I wonder which is the stronger emotion in me just now," she returned; "gratified vanity or curiosity."

"I hope it's the latter," smiled Cunningham. "I

recall now a gallery in which there is a very good copy of the Charmeaux canvas, and I'd be delighted to take you."

"I'll go with pleasure," promised Gail, and Cunningham turned to her with a grateful smile.

"I would prefer to show you the original," he ventured.

"Oh, look at them tuning their drums," cried Gail, and he thought that she had entirely missed his hint, that the keenest delight in his life would be to lead her through the Louvre, and from thence to a perspective of picture galleries, dazzling with all the hues of the spectrum, and as long as life!

He had other things which he wanted to say, but he calculatingly reserved them for the day of the picture viewing, when he would have her exclusive attention; so, through the dance, he talked of trifles far from his heart. He was a nice chap, too.

Dick Rodley was on hand with the last stroke of the music, to claim her for his dance. By one of those waves of unspoken agreement, Gail was being "rushed." It was her night, and she enjoyed it to the full. Perhaps the new awakening in Gail, the crystallisation of which she had been forced to become conscious, had something to do with this. Her cheeks, while no more beautiful in their delicacy of colouring, had a certain quality of translucence, which gave her the indefinable effect of glowing from within; her eyes, while no brighter, had changed the manner of their brightness. They had lost something of their sparkle, which had been replaced by a peculiarly enticing half-veiled scintillation, much as if they were smouldering, only to cast off streams of brilliant sparks at the slightest disturb-

ance; while all about her was the vague intangible aura of magnetic attraction which seemed to flutter and to soothe and to call, all in one.

Dick Rodley was the first to know this vague change in her; perhaps because Dick, with all his experience in the social diversion of love-making, was, after all, more spiritual in his physical perceptions. At any rate he hovered near her at every opportunity throughout the evening, and his own eyes, which had the natural trick of glowing, now almost blazed when they met those of Gail. She liked him, and she did not. She was thrown into a flutter of pleasure when he came near her, she enjoyed a clash of wit, and of will, and of snappy mutual attraction; then suddenly she wanted him away from her, only to welcome him eagerly when he came back.

Van Ploon danced with her, danced conscientiously, keeping perfect time to the music, avoiding, with practised adroitness, every possible pocketing, or even hem contacts with surrounding couples, and acquitting himself of lightly turned observations at the expiration of about every seventy seconds. He was aware that Gail was exceptionally pretty to-night, but, if he stopped to analyse it at all, he probably ascribed it to her delicate blue dancing frock with its opalescent flakes, or her coiffure, or something of the sort. He quite approved of her; extraordinarily so. He had never met a girl who approached so near the thousand per cent. grade of perfection by all the blue ribbon points.

It was while she was enjoying her second restful dance with Van Ploon that Gail, swinging with him near the south windows, heard the honk of an auto horn, and a repetition close after, and, by the acceleration of tone, she discerned that the machine was coming up the

drive at break-neck speed. Moreover, her delicately attuned musical ear recognised something familiar in the sound of the horn; perhaps tone, perhaps duration, perhaps inflection, more likely a combination of all three. Consequently, she was not at all surprised when, near the conclusion of the dance, she saw Allison standing in the doorway of the ballroom, with his hands in his pockets, watching her with a smile. Her eyes lighted with pleasure, and she nodded gaily to him over Van Ploon's tall shoulder. When the dance stopped she was on the far side of the room, and was instantly the centre of a buzzing little knot of dancers, from out of which carefree laughter radiated like visible flashes of musical sound. She emerged from the group with the arms of two bright-eyed girls around her waist, and met Allison sturdily breasting the currents which had set towards the conservatory, the drawing rooms, or the buffet.

"Nobody has saved me a dance," he complained.

"Nobody expected you until to-morrow," Gail smilingly returned, introducing him to the girls. "I'll beg you one of my dances from Ted or somebody."

She was so obviously slated to entertain Allison during this little intermission, that Van Ploon, following the trio in duty bound, took one of the girls and went away, and her partner led the other one to the music room.

"I'll have Lucile piece you out a card," offered Gail, as they strolled naturally across to the little glass enclosed balcony. "I don't think I can secure you one of Arly's dances. She's scandalously popular to-night."

"One will be enough for me, unless you can steal me some more of your own," he told her, glancing down at

her, from coiffure to blue pointed slippers, with calm appreciation. "You are looking great to-night," and his gaze came back to rest in her glowing eyes. Her fresh colour had been heightened by the excitement of the evening, but now an added flush swept lightly over her cheeks, and passed.

"I'll see what I can do," she speculated, looking at her dance card. "The next three are with total strangers, and of course I can't touch those," she laughed. "The fourth one is with Willis Cunningham, and after that is a brief wilderness again. I think one is all you get."

"I'm lucky even to have that," declared Allison in content. "The fourth dance down. That will just give me time to punish the buffet. I'm hungry as a bear. I started out here without my dinner."

They stood at the balcony windows looking out into the wintry night. There was not much to see, not even the lacing of the bare trees against the clouded sky. The snow had gone, and where the light from the windows cut squarely on the ground were bare walks, and cold marble, and dead lawn; all else was blackness; but it was a sufficient landscape for people so intensely concentrated upon themselves.

Her next partner came in search of her presently, and the music struck up, and Allison, nodding to his many acquaintances jovially, for he was in excellent humour in these days of building, and planning, and clearing ground for an entirely new superstructure of life, circled around to the dining room, where he performed savage feats at the buffet. Soon he was out again, standing quietly at the edge of things, and watching Gail with keen pleasure, both when she danced and when, in the intermissions, the gallants of the party

gravitated to her like needles to a magnet. Her popularity pleased him, and flattered him. Suddenly he caught sight of Eldridge Babbitt, a middle-aged man who was watching a young woman with the same pleasure Allison was experiencing in the contemplation of Gail.

"Just the man I wanted to see," announced Allison, making his way to Babbitt. "I have a new freightage proposition for the National Dairy Products Consolidation."

Babbitt brightened visibly. He had been missing something keenly these past two days, and now all at once he realised what it was; business.

"I can't see any possible new angle," returned Babbitt cautiously, and with a backward glance at the dashing young Mrs. Babbitt. He headed instinctively for the library.

Laughingly Gail finished her third dance down. She had enjoyed several sparkling encounters in passing with Dick Rodley, and she was buoyantly exhilarated as she started to stroll from the floor with her partner. She had wanted to find cherub-cheeked Marion Kenneth, and together they walked through the conservatory, and the dining room, and the deserted billiard room, with its bright light on the green cloth and all the rest of the room in dimness. There was a narrow space at one point between the chairs and the table, and it unexpectedly wedged them into close contact. With a sharp intake of his breath, the fellow, a ruddy-faced, thick-necked, full-lipped young man who had followed her with his eyes all evening, suddenly turned, and caught her in his embrace, and, holding back her head in the hollow of his arm, kissed her; a new kiss to her, and horrible!

Suddenly he released her, and stepped back abruptly, filled with remorse.

"Forgive me, Miss Sargent," he begged.

Gail nodded her numb acceptance of the apology, and turning, hurried out of the side door to the veranda. Her knees were trembling, but the fresh, cold air steadied her, and she walked the full length of the wide porch, trying instinctively to forget the sickening humiliation. As she came to the corner of the house, the sharp winter wind tore at her, smote her throat, clutched at her bare shoulders, and stopped her with a sharp physical command. She drew her gauzy little dancing scarf around her, and held it tightly knotted at her throat, and edged closer to the house. She was near a window, and, advancing a step, she looked in. It was the library, and Allison sat there, so clean and wholesome looking, with his pink shaven face and his white evening waistcoat, and his dark hair beginning to sprinkle with grey at the temples. He was so sturdy and so strong and so dependable looking, as he sat earnestly talking with Babbitt. Allison said something, and they both smiled; then Babbitt said something and they both threw back their heads and laughed, while Allison, with one hand in his pocket, waved his other hand over a memorandum pad which lay between them. Gail hurried to the front door and rang the bell.

"Hello, Gail," greeted the cheery voice of Allison, as she came in. "My dance next, isn't it?"

His voice was so good, so comforting, so reassuring.

"I think so," she replied, standing hesitantly in the doorway, and thankful that the lights were canopied in this room.

Allison drew the memorandum pad toward him, and rose.





She was glad to be alone, to rescue herself from the whirl of anger and indignation and humiliation which had swept around her

"By the way, there's one thing I forgot to tell you, Babbitt, and it's rather important." He hesitated and glanced toward the door. "You'll excuse me just half a minute, won't you, Gail?"

She had noticed that assumption of intimate understanding in him before, and she had secretly admired it. Now it was a comfort and a joy.

"Surely," she granted, and passed on in to the library alcove, a sheltered nook where she was glad to be alone, to rescue herself from the whirl of anger, and indignation, and humiliation — above all, humiliation! — which had swept around her. What had she done to bring this despicable experience upon herself? What evil thing had there been in her to summons forth this ugly spectre? She had groped almost deliberately for that other polarity which should complete her, but this painful moment was not one of the things for which she had sought. She could not know, but she had passed one of the inevitable milestones. The very crystallisation which had brightened and whetted her to a keen zest in her natural destiny, had attracted this fellow, inevitably. Her face was hot and cold by turns, and she was almost on the point of crying, in spite of her constantly reiterated self-admonishment that she must control herself here, when Allison came to the door of the alcove.

"All right, Gail," he said laconically.

She felt suddenly weary, but she rose and joined him. When she slipped her hand in his arm, strong, and warm, and pulsing, she was aware of a thrill from it, but the thrill was just restfulness.

"You look a little tired," judged the practical Allison, as they strolled, side by side, into the hall, and he patted the slender hand which lay on his arm.

“Not very,” she lightly replied, and unconsciously she snuggled her hand more comfortably into its resting place. A little sigh escaped her lips, deep-drawn and fluttering. It was a sigh of content.

CHAPTER XI

“GENTLEMEN, THERE IS YOUR EMPIRE!”

THE seven quiet gentlemen who sat with Allison at his library table, followed the concluding flourish of his hand toward the map on the wall, and either nodded or blinked appreciatively. The red line on his map was complete now, a broad, straight line from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and to it were added, on either side, irregular, angling red lines like the legs of a centipede, the feeders of the various systems which were under control of the new Atlantic-Pacific Railroad.

“That’s a brilliant piece of engineering, Allison,” observed huge Richard Haverman, by way of pleasant comment, and he glanced admiringly at Allison after his eye had roved around the little company of notables. The feat of bringing these seven men together at a specific hour, was greater than having consolidated the brilliant new Atlantic-Pacific Railroad.

“Let’s get to the details,” barked a voice with the volume of a St. Bernard. It came from Arthur Grandin, the head of the Union Fuel Company, which controlled all the wood and coal in the United States, and all the oil in the world. His bald spot came exactly on a level with the back of his chair, and he wore a fierce moustache.

“I’m putting in the Atlantic-Pacific as my share of the pool, gentlemen,” explained Allison. “My project,

as I have told you, is to make this the main trunk, the vertebræ as it were, of the International Transportation Company. I have consolidated with the A.-P. the Municipal Transportation Company, and I have put my entire fortune in it, to lay it on the table absolutely unencumbered."

He threw down the Atlantic-Pacific Railroad and the Municipal Transportation Company in the form of a one sheet typewritten paper.

"We'd better appoint some one to look after the legal end of things," suggested the towering Haverman, whose careless, lounging attitude contrasted oddly with his dignified long beard.

"I'll take care of it," said W. T. Chisholm, of the Majestic Trust Company, and drawing the statement in front of him, he set a paperweight on it.

"The first step is not one of incorporation," went on Allison. "Before that is done there must be but one railroad system in the United States."

Smooth-shaven old Joseph G. Clark nodded his head. There was but one cereal company in the United States, and the Standard, in the beginning, had been the smallest. Two of the heads of rival concerns were now in Clark's employ, one was a pauper, and three were dead. He disliked the pauper.

Robert E. Taylor, of the American Textiles Company, a man who had quite disproved the theory that constructive business genius was confined to the North, smoothed his grey moustache reflectively, with the tip of his middle finger, all the way out to its long point.

"I can see where you will tear up the east and west traffic situation to a considerable extent," he thoughtfully commented; "but without the important north and south main trunks you can not make a tight web."

Allison went over to his wall map, with a step in which there was the spring of a boy. A. L. Vance, of the United States Supplies Company, which controlled beef, sugar, and practically all other food products, except those mighty necessities under the sways of the Standard Cereal Company and Eldridge Babbitt's National Dairy Products Consolidation, studied the buoyant Allison with a puzzled expression. He had seen Allison grow to care-burdened manhood, and suddenly Ed seemed twenty years younger. Only Eldridge Babbitt knew the secret of this miraculous rejuvenescence. Babbitt had married late in life; a beautiful young woman!

“The key to the north and south situation is here,” said Allison, and he drew a firm, swift, green line down across the United States, branching at each end. “George Dalrymple will be here in half an hour, and by that time I trust we may come to some agreement.”

“It depends on what you want,” boomed Arthur Grandin, who, sitting beside the immense Haverman, looked as if that giant had shrunk him by his mere proximity.

“Freight, to begin with,” stated Allison, resuming his place at the head of the table, but not his seat. “You gentlemen represent the largest freightage interests in the United States. You all know your relative products, and yet, in order to grasp this situation completely, I wish to enumerate them. Babbitt's National Dairy Products Consolidation can swing the shipment of every ounce of butter, cream, cheese, eggs and poultry handled in this country; Clark's Standard Cereal Company, wheat, corn, oats, rice, barley, malt, flour, every ounce of bread-stuffs or cereal goods, grown on American soil; Haver-

man, the Amalgamated Metals Constructive Company, every pound of iron, lead, and copper, and every ton of ore, from the moment it leaves the ground until it appears as an iron web in a city sky or spans a river; Grandin, the Union Fuel Company, coal and wood, from Alaska to Pennsylvania, with oil and all its enormous by-products; Taylor, the American Textiles Company, wool, cotton, flax, the raw and finished material of every thread of clothing we wear, or any other textile fabric we use except silk; Vance, the United States Supplies Company, meat, sugar, fruit, the main blood and sinew builders of the country. Gentlemen, give me the freightage controlled by your six companies, and I'll toss the rest of the country's freightage to a beggar."

"You forgot Chisholm," Babbitt reminded him, and Banker Chisholm's white mutton-chops turned pink from the appreciation which glowed in his ruddy-veined face.

"Allison was quite right," returned big Haverman with a dry smile. "The freightage income on money is an item scarcely worth considering."

"Give the Atlantic-Pacific this freight, and, inside of two years, the entire business of the United States, with all its ramifications, will be merged in one management, and that management ours. We shall not need to absorb, nor purchase, a single railroad until it is bankrupt."

"Sensible idea, Allison," approved Clark, of the Standard Cereal Company. "It's a logical proposition which I had in mind years ago."

"Allison's stroke of genius, it seems to me, consists in getting us together," smiled big Haverman, hanging his arm over the back of his chair.

Banker Chisholm leaned forward on the table, and stroked his round chin reflectively. “There would be some disorganisation, and perhaps financial disorder, in the first two years,” he considered; “but the railroads are already harassed too much by the government to thrive under competition, and, in the end, I believe this proposed centralisation would be the best thing for the interests of the country”; wherein Chisholm displayed that he was a vestryman of Market Square Church wherever he went.

“What is your proposition?” asked Grandin, who, because of the self-assertion necessitated by his diminutive size, seemed pompous, but was not. No pompous man could have merged the wood, coal, and oil interests, and, having merged them, swung them over his own shoulder.

Allison’s answer consisted of one word.

“Consolidation,” he said.

There was a moment of silence, while these men absorbed that simple idea, and glanced speculatively, not at Allison, but at each other. They were kings, these heads of mighty corporations, whose emissaries carried their sovereignties into the furthest corners of the earth. Like friendly kings, they had helped each other in the protection of their several domains; but this was another matter.

“That’s a large proposition, Ed,” stated Vance, very thoughtfully. All sense of levity had gone from this meeting. They had come, as they thought, to promote a large mutual interest, but not to weld a Frankenstein. “I did not understand your project to be so comprehensive. I fancied your idea to be that the various companies represented here, with Chisholm as financial controller, should take a mutual interest in

the support of the Atlantic-Pacific Railroad, for the purpose of consolidating the railroad interests of the country under one management, thereby serving our own transportation needs."

"Very well put, Vance," approved Taylor, smoothing his pointed moustache.

"That is a mere logical development of the railroad situation," returned Allison. "If I had not cemented this direct route, some one would have made the consolidation you mention within ten years, for the entire railroad situation has been disorganised since the death of three big men in that field; and the scattered holdings would be, and are, an easy prey for any one vitally interested enough to invade the industry. I have no such minor proposition in mind. I propose, with the Atlantic-Pacific as a nucleus, to, first, as I have said, bring the financial terminals of every mile of railroad in the United States into one central office. With this I then propose to combine the National Dairy Products Consolidation, the Standard Cereal Company, the Amalgamated Metals Constructive Company, the Union Fuel, American Textiles, the United States Supplies, and the stupendous financial interests swayed by the banks tributary to the Majestic Trust Company. I propose to weld these gigantic concerns into one corporation, which shall be the mightiest organisation the world has ever known. Beginning with the control of transportation, it will control all food, all apparel, all construction materials, all fuel. From the shoes on his feet to the roof over his head, every man in the United States of America, from labourer to president, shall pay tribute to the International Transportation Company. Gentlemen, if I have dreamed big, it is be-

cause I have dealt with men who deal only in large dreams. What I propose is an empire greater than that ever swayed by any monarch in history. We eight men, who are here in this room, can build that empire with a scratch of a pen, and can hold it against the assaults of the world!”

His voice rang as he finished, and Babbitt looked at him in wonder. Allison had always been a strong man, but now, in this second youth, he was an Anteus springing fresh from the earth. There was a moment's lull, and then a nasal voice drawled into the silence.

“Allison;” it was the voice of old Joseph G. Clark, who had built the Standard Cereal Company out of one wheat elevator; “who is to be the monarch of your new empire?”

For just a moment Allison looked about him. Vastly different as these men were, from the full-bearded Haverman to the smooth-shaven old Joseph G. Clark, there was some one expression which was the same in every man, and that expression was mastery. These men, by the sheer force of their personality, by the sheer dominance of their wills, by the sheer virility of their purposes, by the sheer dogged persistence which balks at no obstacle and hesitates at no foe, had fought and strangled and throttled their way to the top, until they stood head and shoulders above all the strong men of their respective domains, safe from protest or dispute of sovereignty, because none had risen strong enough to do them battle. They were the undefeated champions of their classes, and the life of every man in that group was an epic! Who was to be monarch of the new empire? Allison answered that question as simply as he had the others.

"The best man," he said.

There had been seven big men in America. Now there were eight. They all recognised that.

"Of course," went on Allison, "my proposition does not assume that any man here will begin by relinquishing control of his own particular branch of the International Transportation Company; sugar, beef, iron, steel, oil, and the other commodities will all be under their present handling; but each branch will so support and benefit the other that the position of the consolidation itself will be impregnable against competition or the assaults of government. The advantages of control, collection, and distribution, are so vast that they far outweigh any possible question of personal aggrandisement."

"Don't hedge, Allison," barked Arthur Grandin. "You expressed it right in the first place. You're putting it up to us to step out of the local championship class, and contend for the big belt."

"The prize isn't big enough," pronounced W. T. Chisholm, as if he had decided for them all. As befitted his calling, he was slower minded than the rest. There are few quick turns in banking.

"Not big enough?" repeated Allison. "Not big enough, when the Union Fuel Company already supplies every candle which goes into the Soudan, runs the pumps on the Nile and the motor boats on the Yang-Tse-Kyang, supplies the oil for the lubrication of the car of Juggernaut, and works the propeller of every aeroplane? Not big enough, when already the organisations represented here have driven their industries into every quarter of the earth? What shall you say when we join to our nucleus the great steamship lines and the foreign railroads? Not big enough? Gen-

tllemen, look here!” He strode over to the big globe. From New York to San Francisco a red line had already been traced. Now he took a pencil in his hand, and placing the point at New York, gave the globe a whirl, girding it completely. “Gentlemen, there is your empire!”

Again the nasal voice of old Joseph G. Clark drawled into the silence.

“I suggest that we discuss in detail the conditions of the consolidation,” he remarked.

The bell of Allison’s house phone rang.

“Mr. Dalrymple, sir,” said the voice of Ephraim.

“Very well,” replied Allison. “Show him into the study. Babbitt, will you read to the gentlemen this skeleton plan of organisation? If you’ll excuse me, I’ll be back in five minutes.”

“Dalrymple?” inquired Taylor.

“Yes,” answered Allison abstractedly, and went into the study.

He and Dalrymple looked at each other silently for a moment, with the old enmity shining between them. Dalrymple, a man five years Allison’s senior, a brisk speaking man with a protruding jaw and deep-set grey eyes, had done more than any other one human being to develop the transportation systems of New York, but his gift had been in construction, in creation, whereas Allison’s had been in combination; and Dalrymple had gone into the railroad business.

“Dalrymple, I’m going to give you a chance,” said Allison briskly. “I want the Gulf and Great Lakes Railroad system.”

Dalrymple had produced a cigar while he waited for Allison, and now he lit it. He sat on the corner of the study table and surveyed Allison critically.

"I don't doubt it," he replied. "The system is almost completed."

"I'll accept a fair offer for your controlling interest," went on Allison.

"And if I won't sell?"

"Then I'll jump on you to-morrow in the stock exchange, and take it away from you."

Dalrymple smiled.

"You can't do it. I own my controlling interest outright, and no stock gamblings on the board of trade can affect either a share of my stock or the earning capacity of my railroad. When you drove me out of the traction field, I took advantage of my experience and entrenched myself. Go on and gamble."

"I wish you wouldn't take that attitude," returned Allison, troubled. "It looks to you as if I were pursuing you because of that old quarrel; but I want you to know that I'm not vindictive."

"I don't think you are," replied Dalrymple, with infinite contempt. "You're just a damned hog."

A hot flush swept over Allison's face, but it was gone in an instant.

"It happens that I need the new Gulf and Great Lakes system," he went on, in a perfectly level voice; "and I prefer to buy it from you at a fair price."

Dalrymple put on his hat.

"It isn't for sale," he stated.

"Just a minute, Dalrymple," interposed Allison. "I want to show you something. Look in here," and he opened the library door.

Dalrymple stepped to the opening and saw, not merely seven men, middle-aged and past, sitting around a library table, but practically all the freightable neces-

sities of the United States and practically all its money, a power against which his many million dollar railroad system was of no more opposition than a toy train.

"— the transportation department to be governed by a council composed of the representatives of the various other departments herein mentioned," droned on the voice of Babbitt.

The representatives of the various other departments therein mentioned were bent in concentrated attention on every sentence, and phrase, and word, and syllable of that important document, not omitting to pay important attention to the pauses which answered for commas; and none looked up. Dalrymple closed the door gently.

"Now will you sell?" inquired Allison.

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes, while the old enmity, begun while they were still in the womb of time, lay chill between them. At one instant, Dalrymple, whose jaw muscles were working convulsively, half raised his hands, as if he were minded to fall on Allison and strangle him; and it was not the fact that Allison was probably the stronger man which restrained him, but a bigger pride.

"No," he said, again with that infinite contempt in his tone. "Break me."

"All right," accepted Allison cheerfully, and even with relief; for his way was now free to pursue its normal course. He crossed to the door which opened into the hall, and politely bowed Dalrymple into the guidance of old Ephraim.

"Dalrymple won't sell," he reported, when he rejoined his fellow members of the International Transportation Company.

Joseph G. Clark looked up from a set of jotted memoranda which he had been nonchalantly setting down during the reading.

"We'll pick it up in the stock market," he carelessly suggested.

"Can't," replied Allison, with equal carelessness. "He's entrenched with solid control, and I imagine he doesn't owe a dollar."

Chisholm, with his fingers in his white mutton chops, was studying clean-shaven old Clark's memoranda.

"A panic will be necessary, anyhow," he observed. "We'll acquire the road then."

CHAPTER XII

GAIL SOLVES THE PROBLEM OF VEDDER COURT

THE Reverend Smith Boyd, rector of the richest church in the world, dropped his last collar button on the floor, and looked distinctly annoyed. The collar button rolled under his mahogany highboy, and concealed itself carefully behind one of the legs. The Reverend Smith Boyd, there being none to see, laid aside his high dignity, and got down on his knees, though not for any clerical purpose. With his suspenders hanging down his back, he sprawled his long arms under the highboy in all directions, while his face grew red; and the little collar button, snuggled carefully out of sight behind the furthest leg, just shone and shone. The rector, the ticking of whose dressing-room clock admonished him that the precious moments were passing never to return again, twisted his neck, and bent his head sidewise, and inserted it under the highboy, one ear scraping the rug and the other the bottom of the lowest drawer. No collar button. He withdrew his neck, and twisted his head in the opposite direction, and inserted his head again under the highboy, so that the ear which had scraped the carpet now scraped the bottom of the drawer, whereat the little collar button shone so brightly that the rector's bulging eye caught the glint of it. His hand swung round, at the end of a long arm, and captured it before it could hide any further, then the young rector withdrew his throbbing

head and started to raise up, and bumped the back of his head with a crack on the bottom of an open drawer, near enough to the top to give him a good long sweep for momentum. This mishap being just one degree beyond the point to which the Reverend Smith Boyd had been consecrated, he ejaculated as follows:—

No, it is not respectful, nor proper, nor charitable, to set down what the Reverend Smith Boyd, in that stress, ejaculated; but a beautiful, grey-haired lady, beautiful with the sweetness of content and the happiness of gratified pride and the kindliness of humour, who had paused at the Reverend Smith Boyd's open door to inquire how soon he would be down to dinner, hastily covered her mouth with her hand, and moved away from the door, with moist blue eyes, around which twinkled a dozen tiny wrinkles born of much smiling.

When the dignified young rector came down to dinner, fully clothed and apparently in his right mind, his mother, who was the beautiful grey-haired lady with the twinkling blue eyes, looked across the table and smiled indulgently at his disguise; for he was not a grown-up, tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty-two at all. In reality he was a shock-headed, slightly freckled urchin of nine or ten, by the name of "Smitty" on the town commons, and "Tod" at home.

"Aren't you becoming a trifle irritable of late, Tod?" she inquired with solicitude, wilefully suppressing a smile which flashed up in her as she remembered that ejaculation. It was shocking in a minister, of course, but she had ever contended that ministers were, and should be, made of clay; and clay is friable.

"Yes, mother, I believe I am," confessed the Reverend Smith Boyd, considering the matter with serious impartiality.

"You are not ill in any way?"

"Not at all," he hastily assured her.

"Your cold is all gone?"

"Entirely. As a matter of fact, mother," and he smiled, "I don't think I had one."

"If you hadn't drank that tea, and taken the mustard foot bath, and wrapped the flannel around your throat, it might have been a severe one," his mother complacently replied. "You haven't been studying too much?"

"No," and the slightest flicker of impatience twitched his brows.

"You've no headache?" and the tone was as level as if she had not seen that flicker.

"No, mother."

"Do you sleep well?"

The Reverend Smith Boyd took a drink of water. His hand trembled slightly.

"Excellently."

Mrs. Boyd surveyed her son with a practised eye.

"I think your appetite's dropping off a little," she commented, and then she was shrewdly silent, though the twinkles of humour came back to her eyes by and by. "I don't think you take enough social diversion," she finally advised him. "You should go out more. You should ride, walk, but always in the company of young and agreeable people. Because you are a rector is no reason for you to spend your spare time in gloomy solitude, as you have been doing for the past week."

The Reverend Smith Boyd would have liked to state that he had been very busy, but he had a conscience, which was a nuisance to him. He had spent most of his spare time up in his study, with his chin in his hand.

"You are quite right, mother," he sombrely confessed, and swallowed two spoonfuls of his soup. It was excellent soup, but, after taking a bite of a wafer, he laid his spoon on the edge of the plate.

"I think I'll drive you out of the house, Tod," Mrs. Boyd decided, in the same tones she had used to employ when she had sent him to bed. "I think I'll send you over to Sargent's to-night, to sing with Gail."

The rector of the richest church in the world flushed a trifle, and looked at the barley in the bottom of his soup. His mother regarded him quietly, and the twinkles went out of her eyes. She had been bound to get at the bottom of his irritability, and now she had arrived at it.

"I would prefer not to go," he told her stiffly, and the eyes which he lifted to her were coldly green.

"Why?"

Again that slight twitch of impatience in his brows, then he suppressed a sigh. The catechism was on the way, and he might just as well answer up promptly.

"I do not approve of Miss Sargent."

For just one second the rector's mother felt an impulse to shake Tod Boyd. Gail Sargent was a young lady of whom any young man might approve — and what was the matter with Tod? She was beginning to be humiliated by the fact that, at thirty-two, he had not lost his head and made a fool of himself, to the point of tight shoes and poetry, over a girl.

"Why?" and the voice of Mrs. Boyd was not cold as she had meant it to be. She had suddenly felt some tug of sympathy for Tod.

"Well, for one thing, she has a most disagreeable lack of reverence," he stated.

"Reverence?" and Mrs. Boyd knitted her brows.

"I don't believe you quite understand her. She has the most beautifully simple religious faith that I have ever seen, Tod."

The Reverend Smith Boyd watched his soup disappearing, as if it were some curious moving object to which his attention had just been called.

"Miss Sargent claims to have a new religion," he observed. "She has said most unkind things about the Church as an institution, and about Market Square Church in particular. She says that it is a strictly commercial institution, and that its motive in desiring to build the new cathedral is vanity."

He omitted to mention Gail's further charge that his own motive in desiring the new cathedral was personal ambition. Candour did not compel that admission. It did not become him to act from piqued personal pride.

Mrs. Boyd studied him as he gazed sombrely at his fish, and the twinkles once more returned to her eyes, as she made up her mind to cure Tod's irritability.

"I am ashamed of you," she told her son. "This girl is scarcely twenty. If I remember rightly, and I'm sure that I do, you came to me, at about twenty, and confessed to a logical disbelief in the theory of creation, which included, of course, a disbelief in the Creator. You were an infidel, an atheist. You were going to relinquish your studies, and give up all thought of the Church."

The deep red of the Reverend Smith Boyd's face testified to the truth of this cruel charge, and he pushed back his fish permanently.

"I most humbly confess," he stated, and indeed he had writhed in spirit many times over that remembrance.

"However, mother, I have since discovered that to be

a transitional stage through which every theological student passes."

"Yet you won't allow it to a girl," charged Mrs. Boyd, with the severity which she could much better have expressed with a laugh. "When you discover that this young lady, who seems to be in every way delightful, is so misled as to criticise the motives of Market Square Church, you withdraw into your dignity, with the privilege of a layman, and announce that 'you do not approve of her.' What she needs, Tod, is religious instruction."

She had carefully ironed out the tiny little wrinkles around her blue eyes by the time her son looked up from the profound cogitation into which this reproof had thrown him.

"Mother, I have been wrong," he admitted, and he seemed ever so much brighter for the confession. He drew his fish towards him and ate it.

Later the Reverend Smith Boyd presented himself at James Sargent's house, with a new light shining in his breast; and he had blue eyes. He had come to show Gail the way and the light. If she had doubts, and lack of faith, and flippant irreverence, it was his duty to be patient with her, for this was the fault of youth. He had been youthful himself.

Gail's eyelids dropped and the corners of her lips twitched when the Reverend Smith Boyd's name was brought up to her, but she did her hair in another way, high on her head instead of low on her neck, and then she went down, bewildering in her simple little dark blue velvet cut round at the neck.

"I am so glad your cold is better," she greeted him, smiling as pleasantly as if their last meeting had been a most joyous occasion.

"I don't think I had a cold," laughed the young rector, also as happily mannered as if their last meeting had been a cheerful one. "I sneezed twice, I believe, and mother immediately gave me a course of doctoring which no cold could resist."

"I was afraid that your voice was out," remarked Gail, in a tone suggestive of the fact that that would be a tragedy indeed; and she began hauling forth music. "You haven't been over for so long."

The Reverend Smith Boyd coloured. At times the way of spiritual instruction was quite difficult. Nevertheless, he had a duty to perform. Mechanically he had taken his place at the piano, standing straight and tall, and his blue eyes softened as they automatically fell on the piece of music she had opened. Of course it was their favourite, the one in which their voices had soared in the most perfect unison. Gail glanced up at him as she brushed a purely imaginary fleck of dust from the keys. For an instant the brown eyes and the blue ones met. He was a tremendously nice fellow, after all. But what was worrying him?

"Before we sing I should like to take up graver matters," he began, feeling at a tremendous disadvantage in the presence of the music. To obviate this, he drew up a chair, and sat facing her. "I have called this evening in the capacity of your temporary rector."

Gail's eyelids had a tendency to flicker down, but she restrained them. She was adorable when she looked prim that way. Her lips were like a rosebud. The Reverend Smith Boyd himself thought of the simile, and cast it behind him.

"You are most kind," she told him, suppressing the imps and demons which struggled to pop into her eyes.

"I have been greatly disturbed by the length to

which your unbelief has apparently gone," the young rector went on, and having plunged into this opening he began to breathe more freely. This was familiar ground. "I am willing to admit, to one of your intelligence, that there are certain articles of the creed, and certain tenets of the Church, which humanity has outgrown, as a child outgrows its fear of the dark."

Gail rested a palm on the edge of the bench behind her, and leaned back facing him, supported on one beautifully modelled arm. Her face had set seriously now.

"However," went on the rector, "it is the habit and the privilege of youth to run to extremes. Sweeping doubt takes the place of reasonable criticism, and the much which is good is condemned alike with the little which has grown useless."

He paused to give Gail a chance for reply, but that straight-eyed young lady had nothing to say, at this juncture.

"I do not expect to be able to remove the spiritual errors, which I am compelled to judge that you have accumulated, by any other means than patient logic," he resumed. "May I discuss these matters with you?" His voice was grave and serious, and full of earnest sincerity, and the musical quality alone of it made patient logical discussion seem attractive.

"If you like," she assented, smiling at him with wileful and wilful deception. The wicked thought had occurred to her that it might be her own duty to broaden his spiritual understanding.

"Thank you," he accepted gravely. "If you will give me an hour or so each week, I shall be very happy."

"I am nearly always at home on Tuesday and Friday evenings," suggested Gail. "Scarcely any one

calls before eight thirty, and we have dinner quite early on those evenings." She began to be sincerely interested in the project. She had never given herself time to quite exactly define her own attitude towards theology as distinct from religion, and she felt that she should do it, if for no other reason than to avoid making impulsive over-statements. The Reverend Smith Boyd would help her to look squarely into her own mind and her own soul, for he had a very active intelligence, and was, moreover, the most humanly forceful cleric she had ever met. Besides, they could always finish by singing.

"I shall make arrangements to be over as early as you will permit," declared the rector, warmly aglow with the idea. "We shall begin with the very beginnings of things, and, step by step, develop, I hope, a logical justification of the vast spiritual revolution which has conquered the world."

"I should like nothing better," mused Gail, and since the Reverend Smith Boyd rose, and stood behind her and filled his lungs, she turned to the piano and struck a preliminary chord, which she trailed off into a tinkling little run, by way of friendly greeting to the piano.

"We shall begin with the creation," pursued the rector, dwelling, with pleasure, on the idea of a thorough progress through the mazes of religious growth. There were certain vague points which he wanted to clear up for himself.

"And wind up with Vedder Court." She had not meant to say that. It just popped into her mind, and popped off the end of her tongue.

"Even that will be taken up in its due logical sequence," and the Reverend Smith Boyd prided himself

on having already displayed the patience which he had come expressly to exercise.

Gail was immediately aware that he was exercising patience. He had reproved her, nevertheless, and quite coldly, for having violated the tacit agreement to take up the different phases of their weighty topic only "in their due logic sequence." The rector, in this emergency, would have found no answer which would stand the test, but Gail had the immense advantage of femininity.

"It altogether depends at which end we start our sequence," she sweetly reminded him. "My own impression is that we should begin at Vedder Court and work back to the creation. Vedder Court needs immediate attention."

That was quite sufficient. When Allison called, twenty minutes later, they were at it hammer and tongs. There was a bright red spot in each of Gail's cheeks, and the Reverend Smith Boyd's cold eyes were distinctly green! Allison had been duly announced, but the combatants merely glanced at him, and finished the few remarks upon which they were, at the moment, engaged. He had been studying the tableau with the interest of a connoisseur, and he had devoted his more earnest attention to the Reverend Smith Boyd.

"So glad to see you," said Gail conventionally, rising and offering him her hand. If there was that strange thrill in his clasp, she was not aware of it.

"I only ran in to see if you'd like to take a private car trip in the new subway before it is opened," offered Allison, turning to shake hands with the Reverend Smith Boyd. "Will you join us, Doctor?"

For some reason a new sort of jangle had come into the room, and it affected the three of them. Allison

was the only one who did not notice that he had taken Gail's acceptance for granted.

"You might tell us when," she observed, transferring the flame of her eyes from the rector to Allison. "I may have conflicting engagements."

"No, you won't," Allison cheerfully informed her; "because it will be at any hour you set."

"Oh," was the weak response, and, recognising that she was fairly beaten, her white teeth flashed at him in a smile of humour. "Suppose we say ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

"I am free at that hour," stated Doctor Boyd, in answer to a glance of inquiry from Allison. He felt it his duty to keep in touch with public improvements. Also, beneath his duty lay a keen pleasure in the task.

"You'll be very much interested, I think," and Allison glowed with the ever-present pride of achievement, then he suddenly grinned. "The new subway stops at the edge of Vedder Court, waiting."

There was another little pause of embarrassment, in which Gail and the Reverend Smith Boyd were very careful not to glance at each other. Unfortunately, however, the Reverend Smith Boyd was luckless enough to automatically, and without conscious mental process, fold the sheet of music which had long since been placed on the piano.

"Why stop at the edge of Vedder Court?" inquired Gail, with a nervous little jerk, much as if the words had been jolted out of her by the awkward slam of the music rack, which had succeeded the removal of the song. "Why not go straight on through, and demolish Vedder Court? It is a scandal and a disgrace to civilisation, and to the city, as well as to its present proprietors! Vedder Court should be annihilated, torn down,

burned up, swept from the face of the earth! The board of health should condemn it as unsanitary, the building commission should condemn it as unsafe, the department of public morals should condemn it as unwholesome!"

The Reverend Smith Boyd had been engaged in a strong wrestle within himself, but the spirit finally conquered the flesh, and he held his tongue. He remembered that Gail was young, and youth was prone to extravagant impulse. His spirit of forbearance came so strongly to his aid that he was even able to acknowledge how beautiful she was when she was stiffened.

Allison had been viewing her with mingled admiration and respect.

"By George, that's a great idea," he thoughtfully commented. "Gail, I think I'll tear down Vedder Court for you!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

A SHORT, thick old man, grey-bearded and puff-eyed and loaded with enormous jewels, met Gail, Lucile and Arly, Ted Teasdale and the Reverend Smith Boyd, at the foot of the subway stairs, and introduced himself with smiling ease as Tim Corman, beaming with much pride in his wide-spread fame.

"Mr. Allison sent me to meet you," he stated, with a bow on which he justly prided himself. "Allison played a low trick on me, ladies," and he gazed on them in turns with a jovial familiarity, which, in another, they might have resented. "From the description he gave me, I was looking for the most beautiful young lady in the world, and here there's three of you." His eyes swelled completely shut when he laughed. "So you'll have to help me out. Which one of you is Miss Sargent?"

"The young lady who answers the description," smiled Arly, delighted with Tim Corman, and she indicated Gail.

"Mr. Allison couldn't be here," explained Tim, leading the way to the brightly lighted private car. "We're to pick him up at Hoadley Park. Miss Sargent, as hostess of the party, is to have charge of everything."

The side doors slid open as they approached, and they entered the carpeted and draped car, furnished with wicker chairs and a well-stocked buffet. In the for-

ward compartment were three responsible looking men and a motorman, and one of the responsables, a fat gentleman who did not seem to care how his clothes looked, leaned into the parlour.

"All ready?" he inquired, with an air of concealing a secret impression that women had no business here.

Tim Corman, who had carefully seen to it that he had a seat between Gail and Arly, touched Gail on the glove.

"Ready, thank you," she replied, glancing brightly at the loosely arrayed fat man, and she could see that immediately a portion of that secret impression was removed.

With an easy glide, which increased with surprising rapidity into express speed, the car slid into the long, glistening tunnel, still moist with the odours of building.

"This is the most stunningly exclusive thing in the world!" exclaimed Lucile Teasdale. "A private subway!"

The Reverend Smith Boyd bent forward. All the way down to the subway entrance he had enjoyed the reversal to that golden age where no one says anything and everybody laughs at it.

"To my mind that is not the greatest novelty," he observed. "The most enjoyable part of the journey so far has been getting into the subway without paying a nickel." He glanced over at Gail as he spoke, but only Arly, Lucile and Ted laughed. Tim Corman had adroitly blocked Gail into a corner, and was holding her attention.

"Ed Allison's one of the smartest boys in New York," he enthusiastically declared. "Did you ever see anybody as busy as he is?"

"He seems to be a very energetic man," Gail assented, with a sudden remembrance of how busy Allison had always been.

"Gets anything he goes after," Tim informed her, and screwed one of his many-puffed eyes into a wink; at which significant action Gail looked out at the motor-man. "Never tells his plans to anybody, nor what he wants. Just goes and gets it."

"That's a successful way, I should judge," she responded, now able to see the humour of Tim Corman's volunteer mission, but a red spot beginning to dawn, nevertheless, in either cheek.

"Well, he's square," asserted Tim judicially. "Understand, he don't care how he gets a thing just so he gets it, but if he makes you a promise he'll keep it. That's what I call square."

Gail nodded. She had discerned that quality in Allison.

"What I like about him is that he always wins," went on Tim. "Nobody in this town has ever passed him the prunes. Do you know what he did? He started with two miles of rust and four horse cars, and now he owns the whole works."

Gail knitted her brows. She had heard something of this marvellous tale before, and it had interested her. She had been groping for an explanation of Allison's tremendous force.

"That was a wonderful achievement. How did he accomplish it?"

"Made 'em get off and walk!" boasted Tim, with vast pride in the fact. "Any time Eddie run across a man that had a street car line, he choked it out of him. He's a wizard."

Tim's statement seemed to be somewhat clouded in

metaphor, but Gail managed to gather that Allison had possibly used first-principle methods on his royal pathway to success.

"You mean that he drove them out of business."

"Pushed 'em off!" and Tim's voice was exultant.

"I don't think I understand business," worried Gail.
"It seems so cruel."

"So is baseball, if you want to figure that it's a shame the losers have to take a licking," chuckled Tim. "Anybody Allison likes is lucky," and with the friendly familiarity of an old man, Tim Corman patted Gail on the glove.

"It occurs to me that I'm neglecting my opportunities," observed Gail, rising. "I'm supposed to be running this car," and going to the glass door she looked into the motorman's compartment, which was large, and had seats in it, and all sorts of mysterious tools and appliances in the middle of the floor.

Tim Corman, as Allison's personal representative, was right on the spot.

"Come on out," he invited, and opened the door, whereupon the three responsible looking men immediately arose.

Gail hesitated, then smiled. She turned to look at the others, half wondering if she should invite them to come, and whether a crowd would be welcomed, but the quartette were gathered on the observation platform, watching the tunnel swallowing itself in a far-away point.

"Mr. Greggory, general manager of the Municipal Transportation Company, Miss Sargent," introduced Tim, and the fat man bowed, with still another portion of that secret opinion removed. "Mr. Lincoln, general engineer of the Transportation Company, Miss

Sargent," and the thin-faced man with the high forehead and the little French moustache, bowed, smiling his decided approval. "Mr. McCarthy, general construction manager of the Transportation Company, Miss Sargent," and the red-faced man with the big red moustache, bowed, grinning. Tim Corman led Gail forward to the motorman, and tapped him on the shoulder. "Show her how it works, Tom," he directed.

So it was that Edward E. Allison, standing quite alone on the platform of the Hoadley Park station, saw the approaching trial trip car stop, and run slowly, and run backwards, and dart forwards, and perform all sorts of experimental movements, before it rushed down to his platform, with a rosy-cheeked girl standing at the wheel, her brown eyes sparkling, her red lips parted in a smile of ecstatic happiness, her hat off and her waving brown hair flowing behind her in the sweep of the wind. To one side stood a highly pleased motorman, while a short, thick old man, and a careless fat man, and a man with a high forehead and one with a red moustache, all smiling indulgently, clogged the space in the rear.

Allison boarded the car, and greeted his guests, and came straight through to the motorman's cage, as Gail, in response to the clang of the bell, pulled the lever. She was just getting that easy starting glide, and she was filled with pride in the fact.

"You should not stand bare-headed in front of that window," greeted Allison, almost roughly; and he closed it.

Gail turned very sweetly to the motorman.

"Thank you," she said, and gave him the lever, then she walked back into the car. It had required some repression to avoid recognising that dictatorial atti-

tude, and Allison felt that she was rather distant, and wondered what was the matter; but he was a practical minded person, and he felt that it would soon blow over.

"This is the deepest line in the city," he informed her, as she led the way back to the group in the parlour division. "Every subway we build presents more difficult problems of construction because of the crossings."

"I should think it would be most difficult," she indifferently responded, and hurried back to the girls.

"I feel horribly selfish," she confessed, slipping her arm around Lucile on one side and Arly on the other; and the Reverend Smith Boyd, strangely inclined to poetry these days, compared them to the Three Graces, with Hope in the centre. They were an attractive picture for the looking of any man; the blonde Lucile, the brown Gail, and the black-haired Arly, all fresh-cheeked, slender, and sparkling of eye.

"I'm glad your conscience smites you," smiled Arly. "Wasn't it fun?"

"The most glorious in the world!" and Gail glanced doubtfully at Tim Corman, who was right on the spot.

"Come on, girls," heartily invited Tim, who could catch a hint as fast as any man. "I'll introduce you to Tom," and, profoundly happy in his gallantry, he returned to the front of the car with a laughing blonde on one arm and a laughing brunette on the other.

Allison turned confidently to chat with Gail, but that young lady, smiling on the Reverend Smith Boyd, moved back to the observation platform, and the Reverend Smith Boyd followed the smile with alacrity.

"I've been neglecting this view," she observed, gazing out into the rapidly diminishing perspective, then

she glanced up sidewise at the tall young rector, whose eyes were perfectly blue.

He answered something or other, and the conversation was so obviously a tête-à-tête that Allison remained behind. Ted Teasdale had long since found, in the engineer, a man who knew motor boating in every phase of its failures; so that Allison and Tim Corman were in sole possession of the parlour compartment, and Tim looked up at Allison with a complacent grin, as the latter sat beside him.

"Well, Eddie, I put in a plug for you," stated Tim, with the air of one looking for approval.

"How's that?" inquired Allison, abstractedly.

"Boosted you to the girl. Say, she's a peach!"

Allison looked quickly back at the platform, and then frowned down on his zealous friend Tim.

"What did you tell Miss Sargent about me?"

"Don't you worry, Eddie; it's all right," laughed Tim. "I hinted to her, so that she had to get it, that you're about the most eligible party in New York. I let her know that no man in this village had ever skinned you. She wanted to know how you made this big combination, and I told her you made 'em all get off; pushed 'em off the map. Take it from me, Eddie, after I got through, she knew where to find a happy home."

Allison's brows knitted in quick anger, and then suddenly he startled the subway with its first loud laugh. He understood now, or thought he did, Gail's distant attitude; but, knowing what was the matter, he could easily straighten it out.

"Thanks, Tim," he chuckled. "Let's talk business a minute. I had you hold up the Vedder Court condemnation because I got a new idea last night. Those buildings are unsafe."

"Well, the building commissioners have to make a living," considered Tim.

"That's what I think," agreed Allison.

Tim Corman looked up at him shrewdly out of his puffy slits of eyes, for a moment, and considered.

"I get you," he said, and the business talk being concluded, Allison went forward.

"McCarthy," he snapped, in a voice which grated; "what are all those boxes back in the beginning of the 'Y' of the West Docks branch?"

"Blasting material," and McCarthy looked uncomfortable.

"Get it out," ordered Allison, and returned to Tim.

The girls and Ted came back presently, and, with their arrival, Gail brought the Reverend Smith Boyd into the crowd, thereupon they resolved themselves into some appearance of sociability, and Allison, for the amusement of the company, slyly started old Tim Corman into a line of personal reminiscences, so replete in unconscious humour and so frank in unconscious disclosure of callous knavery, that the company needed no other entertainment.

Out into the open, where the sun paled the electric lights of the car into a sickly yellow, up into the air, peering into third story tenements and down narrow alleys, aflutter with countless flapping pieces of laundry work, then suddenly into the darkness of the tunnel again, then out, on the surface of country fields, and dreary winter landscape, to the terminal. It was more cosy in the tunnel, and they returned there for lunch, while the general manager and the general engineer and the general construction manager of the Municipal Transportation Company, with occasional crisp visits from President Allison, soberly discussed the condi-

tion of the line. The Reverend Smith Boyd displayed an unexpected technical interest in that subject. He had taken an engineering course in college, and, in fact, he had once wavered seriously between that occupation and the Church, and he put two or three questions so pertinent that he awakened a new respect in Allison. Allison took the rector to the observation platform to explain something in the construction of the receding tunnel, and as they stood there earnestly talking, with concentrated brows and eyes searching into each other for quick understanding, Gail Sargent was suddenly struck by a wonder as to what makes the differences in men. Allison, slightly stocky, standing with his feet spread sturdily apart and his hands in his coat pockets, and his clean-cut profile slightly upturned to the young rector, was the very epitome of force, of decisive action, of unconquerable will. He seemed to fairly radiate resistless energy, and as she looked, Gail was filled with the admiration she had often felt for this exponent of the distinctively American spirit of achievement. She had never seen the type in so perfect an example, and again there seemed to wave toward her that indefinable thrill with which he had so often impressed her. Was the thrill altogether pleasurable? She could not tell, but she did know that with it there was mixed a something which she could not quite fathom in herself. Was it dislike? No, not that. Was it resentment? Was it fear? She asked herself that last question again.

The young rector was vastly different; taller and broader-shouldered, and more erect of carriage, and fully as firm of profile, he did not somehow seem to impress her with the strength of Allison. He was more temperamental, and, consequently, more susceptible to change; therefore weaker. Was that deduction cor-

rect? She wondered, for it troubled her. She was not quite satisfied.

Suddenly there came a dull, muffled report, like the distant firing of a cannon; then an interval of silence, an infinitesimal one, in which the car ran smoothly on, and, half rising, they looked at each other in startled questioning. Then, all at once, came a stupendous roar, as if the world had split asunder, a jolting and jerking, a headlong stoppage, a clattering, and slapping and crashing and grinding, deafening in its volume, and with it all, darkness; blackness so intense that it seemed almost palpable to the touch!

There was a single shriek, and a nervous laugh verging on hysteria. The shriek was from Arly, and the laugh from Lucile. There was a cry from the forward end of the car, as if some one in pain. A man's yell of fright; Gregory the general manager. A strong hand clutched Gail's in the darkness, firm, reassuring. The rector.

"Don't move!" it was the voice of Allison, crisp, harsh, commanding.

"Anybody hurt?" Tim Corman, the voice of age, but otherwise steady. One could sense, somehow, that he sat rigid in his chair, with both hands on his cane.

"It's me," called Tom, the motorman. "Head cut a little, arm bruised. Nothing bad."

"Gail?" Allison again.

"Yes." Clear voiced, with the courage which has no sex.

"Mrs. Teasdale? Mrs. Fosland?"

Both all right, one a trifle sharp of voice, the other nervous.

"Ted? Doctor Boyd?" and so through the list. Everybody safe.

"It is an accidental blast," said the voice of Allison. He had figured that a concise statement of just what had happened might expedite organisation. "We are below the Farmount Ridge, over a hundred feet deep, and the tube has caved in on us. There must be no waste of exertion. Don't move until I find what electrical dangers there are."

They obeyed his admonition not to move, even to the extent of silence; for there was an instinct that Allison might need to hear minutely. He made his way into the front compartment, he called the chief engineer. There was a clanking of the strange looking implements on the floor of the car. A match flared up, and showed the pale face of the engineer bending over.

"No matches," ordered Allison. "We may need the oxygen."

He and the engineer made their way back into the parlour compartment. They took up the door of the motor well in the floor, and in a few minutes they replaced it. From the sounds they seemed remarkably clumsy.

"That much is lucky," commented Allison. "The next thing is to dig."

They were quiet a moment.

"In front or behind?" wondered the engineer.

Again a pause.

"In front," decided Allison. "The explosion came from that direction, and has probably shaken down more of the soil there than behind, but it's solid clay in the rear, and further out."

Gail felt the rector's hand suddenly leave her own. It had been wonderfully comforting there in the dark; so firm and warm and steady. He had not talked much to her, just a few reassuring words, in that low, melodi-

ous voice, which thrilled her as did occasionally the touch of Allison's hand, as did the eyes of Dick Rodley. But she had received more strength from the voice of Allison. He was big, Allison, a power, a force, a spirit of command. She began, for the first time, to comprehend his magnitude.

"What have we to dig with?" The voice of the Reverend Smith Boyd, and there was a note of eagerness in it.

"The benches up in front here," yelled McCarthy, and there was a ripping sound as he tore the seat from one of them.

"Pardon me." It was the voice of the rector, up in front.

"The balance of you sit down, and keep rested," ordered Allison, now also up in front. "McCarthy, Boyd and I go first."

The long struggle began. The girls grouped together in the back of the car, moving but very little, for there was much broken glass about. Up in front the three men could be heard making an opening into the débris through the forward windows. They talked a great deal, at first, strong, capable voices. They were interfering with each other, then helping, combining their strength to move heavy stones and the like, then they were silent, working independently, or in effective unison.

Tim Corman was the possessor of a phosphorescent-faced watch, with twenty-two jewels on the inside and a ruby on the winding stem, and he constituted himself timekeeper.

"Thirty minutes," he called out. "It's our shift."

"You'd better save yourself, Tim," suggested Gregory, in a kindly tone.

"I'll do as much as any of you!" growled old Tim, with the will, if not the quality, of youth in his voice. "Will one of you girls take care of my rings?" and stripping them from his fingers, he laid them carefully in the outstretched hands of Arly. There was a good handful of them.

The men crawled in from outside, but they stayed in the front compartment. The air was growing a trifle close, and they breathed heavily.

"Good-bye Girl," called the gaily funereal voice of Ted Teasdale. "Husband is going to work."

"Put on your gloves," Lucile reminded him.

"Greggory," called Allison.

"Here," responded the careless fat man. "How did you find it?"

"Loose," reported Allison, and there was a sound suspiciously like grunting, as Greggory crawled through the narrow opening.

Another interminable wait, while the air grew more stifling. There was no further levity after Lincoln and the motorman and McCarthy had come back; for the condition was becoming serious. Some air must undoubtedly be finding its way to the car through the loose débris, but the carbonic acid gas exhaled from a dozen pairs of lungs was beginning to pocket, and the opening ahead, though steadily pushing forward, displayed no signs of lessening solidity.

They established shorter shifts now; a quarter of an hour. The men came silently in and out, and as silently worked, and as silently rested, while the girls carried that heavy burden of women's hardest labour; waiting!

Greggory was the first to give out, then the injured motorman. When their turns came, they had not the

strength nor the air in their lungs. Strong McCarthy was the next to join them.

The shifts had reduced to two, of two men each by now; Ted and old Tim, and Allison and the rector; and these latter two worked double time. Their lips and their tongues were parched and cracking, and in their periods of rest they sat motionlessly facing each other, with a wheeze in the drawing of their breath. Their stentorian breathing could be heard from the forward end of their little tunnel clear back into the car, where the three girls were battling to preserve their senses against the poisonous gases which were now all that they had to breathe. Acting on the rector's advice, they had stood up in the car to escape the gradually rising level of the carbonic gas, stood, as the time progressed, with their mouths agape and their breasts heaving and sharp pains in their lungs at every breath. Arly dropped, silently crumpling to the floor; then, a few minutes later, Lucile, and, panic-stricken by the thought that they had gone under, Gail felt her own senses reeling, when suddenly, looking ahead through eyes which were staring, she saw a crack of blessed light!

There was a hoarse cry from ahead! The crack of light widened. Another one appeared, some four feet to the right of it, and Gail already fancied that she could feel a freshening of the air she breathed with such tearing pain. Against the light of the openings, two figures, the only two which were left to work, strove, at first with the slow, limp motions of exhaustion, and then with the renewed vigour of approaching triumph. She could distinguish them clearly now, by the light which streamed in, the stocky, strong figure of Allison and the tall, sinewy figure of the rector. They were

working frantically, Allison with his coat off, and the rector with his coat and vest both removed, and one sleeve torn almost entirely from his shirt, revealing his swelling biceps, and a long, red scratch. Gail's senses were numbed, so that they were reduced to almost merely optical consciousness, so that she saw things photographically; but, even in her numbness, she realised that what she had thought a trace of weakness in the rector, was only the grace which had rounded his strength.

The two figures bent inward toward each other. There was a moment of mighty straining, and then the whole centre between the two cracks rolled away. A huge boulder had barred the path, and its removal let down a rush of pure, fresh air from the ground above, let down, too, a flood of dazzling light; and in the curving, under-rim of the opening, stood the two stalwart men who were the survival of the fittest! The mere instinct of self-preservation drove Gail forward, with a cry, toward the source of that life-giving air, and she scrambled through the window and ran toward the two men. They came hurriedly down to meet her, and each gave her a hand.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FREE AND ENTIRELY UNCURBED

GAIL SARGENT became suddenly and acutely aware of an entirely new and ethnological subdivision of the human race. She had known of Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians, and the others, but now she was to meet the representatives of the gay, carefree, and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press! They figuratively swarmed from the ground, dropped from the eaves, and wriggled from under the rugs!

Immediately after Gail had reached home from the accident in the subway, and had been put to bed and given tea, and had repeatedly assured the doctor there was nothing the matter with her, they brought, at her urgent request, copies of the "extras," which were already being yelled from every street corner and down every quiet residence block.

The accounts were, in the main, more or less accurate, barring the fact that they started with the assumption that there had been one hundred in Allison's party, all killed. Later issues, however, regretfully reduced the number of dead to forty, six, and finally none, at which point they became more or less coherent, and gave an exact list of the people who were there, the cause of the accident, and a most appreciatively accentuated history of the heroic work of the men. Although she regretted that her picture had by this time crept into the public prints, grouped with the murders and defalcations of the day, she was able to overlook this personal discomfort as one of the minor penalties which civilisation has

paid for its progress; like electric light bugs and electric fan neuralgia, and the smell of gasoline.

Long before this period, however, the reporters had tracked her to her lair; so long before, in fact, that there had been three of them waiting on the doorstep when she was brought into the house, eager young men, with a high spirit of reverence and delicacy, which was concentrated entirely on their jobs. They would have held her on the doorstep until she fainted or dropped dead, if, by so doing, they could have secured one statement, or hint of a statement, upon which they could have fastened something derogatory to her reputation, or the reputation of any of her family or friends; for that was great stuff, and what the public wanted; and they would have photographed her gleefully in the process of expiring. Aunt Helen Davies, being a woman of experience, snatched Gail into the house before they had taken more than eight or nine photographs of her, but, from that instant, the doorbell became a nuisance and the telephone bell a torture! Both were finally disconnected, but, at as late an hour as one A. M., the house was occasionally assaulted.

By that time Gail had telegrams of frantic inquiry from all her friends back home, including the impulsive Clemmens, and particularly including a telegram from her mother, stating that that highly agitated lady could not secure a reservation on the first train on account of its being Saturday night, but that she would start on the fast eleven-thirty the next morning, whereat Gail kissed the telegram, and cried a little, and gave way to the moist joy of homesickness.

In the meantime, the representatives of the gay and carefree and absolutely uncurbed metropolitan press, were by no means discouraged by the fact that they

had not been able to secure much, except hectic imaginings from the exterior of the Sargent house. They were busy in every other possible direction, with the same commendable persistence which we observe in an ant trying to drag a grasshopper up and down a cornstalk on the way home. They secured a straight story from Allison, a modest one from the rector, and variously viewed experiences from other male members of the party, and collected huge piles of photographs, among them the charming pictures of Gail, which had previously been printed on the innocent pages of arrivals at Palm Beach and the Riviera and other fashionable winter resorts, the whole spread being headed "What Society Is Doing."

So far the explosion editors of the various papers had seen nothing to particularly commend in the work of their fevered emissaries, and even the heavy-jawed genius who gathered, from silent cogitation over four cigarettes and a quart of beer, the purple fiction that the explosion had cracked the walls of every subway in the city, which were likely to cave in at any time, only received the compliment of a grateful grunt.

Little Miss Piper, of the *Morning Planet*, however, was possessed of a better thought. She was a somewhat withered and puckered little woman, who had sense enough to dress so as to excite nothing but pity, and she quietly slipped on her ugly little bonnet with the funny ribbon bow in the back, and hurried out to the magnificent residence of Mrs. Phyllis Worthmore, who loathed publicity and had photographs taken once a month for the purpose.

Mrs. Phyllis Worthmore was invariably sweet and gracious to working women, for, after all, they were her sisters, you know; and she excused herself from a

caller in order to meet little Miss Piper in Mr. Worthmore's deserted den. Mrs. Worthmore was highly agitated over the news of the explosion, and she required no particular urging to jabber on and on about her dear friends who had been in that terrible catastrophe, and she was ultra enthusiastic when the name of Gail was mentioned.

"Oh, Miss Sargent is quite the sensation of the season!" she gushed. "Her people are fairly well to do, I believe; but her beauty makes up for the absence of any extravagant fortune. It is commonly conceded that none of the eligibles in our set are available until Miss Sargent has made her choice. Positively all of them are at her feet!" and, at puckered little Miss Piper's later request, she lightly enumerated a few of the eligibles in their set; after which Miss Piper took to furtive glances at her watch, and to feeling the excessively modulated voice of Mrs. Phyllis Worthmore pounding into her brain like the clatter of a watchman's rattle.

The result of that light-hearted and light-headed interview, in which Mrs. Phyllis Worthmore, by special request, was not quoted, suddenly sprang on the startled eyes of Gail, when she leaped through the *Sunday Morning Planet* at eight o'clock next morning. An entire page, embellished in the centre with a beautifully printed photograph, was devoted to the sensational beauty from the middle west! Around her were grouped nine smaller photographs; Allison, Dick Rodley, Willis Cunningham, Houston Van Ploon, the Reverend Smith Boyd, a callow youth who had danced with her three times, a Count who had said "How do you do?" and sailed for Europe, and two men whom she had never met. All these crack eligibles were classi-

fied under the general head of "Slaves to Her Witching Smile," and a big, boxed-in list was given, in extremely black-faced type, stating, in dollars and cents, the exact value in the matrimonial market of each slave; and the lively genius who had put together this symposium, by a toweringly happy thought conceived in the very height of the rush hours, totalled the whole, and gave it as the commercial worth of Gail's beauty and charm. It ran into thirteen figures, including the dollar mark and the two ciphers for cents.

Nor was this all! A lightning fingered artist had depicted, at the bottom of the group, outline sketches of the nine suitors, on their knees in a row, holding up, towards the beautiful picture of Gail in the centre, their hearts in one hand and their bags of money in the other; and, even though overworked, the artist had not forgotten to put the Cross of the Legion of Honour on the breast of the Count, nor the sparse Van Dyke on Willis Cunningham. Flowing with further facile fancy, he had embellished the upper right-hand corner of the group with an extremely lithe and slim-waisted drawing of the streaming haired Gail, as a siren fishing in the sea; and the sea, represented by many frothing curls, was, in the upper left-hand corner, densely populated by foolish little gold fish, rushing eagerly to the dangling bait of the siren. Any one of the parties mentioned could have sued the *Planet* for libel; but they would not, and they would have been made highly ridiculous if they had, which was the joke of the whole matter, and left the metropolitan press more and more highly uncurbed; which was a right sturdily to be maintained in a land of free speech!

When Lucile Teasdale and Arly Fosland arrived at Jim Sargent's house at ten o'clock, and had been let in

at the side entrance, they found Gail dabbing her eyes with a powder puff, taken from a little black travelling bag which stood open at her side. Arlene was a second later than Lucile in clasping Gail in her arms, because she had to lift a travelling veil. The two girls expressed their condolence and their horror of the outrage, and volubly poured out more sympathy; then they sat down and shrieked with laughter.

"It's too awful for words!" gasped Lucile. "But it is funny, too."

Gail's chin quivered.

"There should be a law against such things," she broken-heartedly returned, in a voice which wavered and halted with the echoes of recent sobs.

"I'll put the *Planet* out of business!" stormed Jim Sargent, stalking up and down the library, with his fists clenched and his face purple. "I'll bankrupt them!" and he paused, as he passed, to reassuringly pat the shoulder of poor Aunt Grace, who sat perfectly numb holding one thumb until the bone ached. Her eyes were frankly red, and the creases of worry had set into her brow so deeply that they must have scarred her skull. "I'll hunt up the whelp who wrote that stuff, and the cur who drew it, and the dog who inserted it!" frothed the raging Jim. "I'll —"

"The press is the palladium of our national liberty, Uncle Jim," drawled the soothing voice of Ted.

"You can't do a thing about it," counselled Gerald Fosland, a stiff looking gentleman who never made a mistake of speech, or manner, or attire.

"Shucks, Gail!" suddenly remembered Lucile. "The big Faulker reception is this week, and your gown was to be so stunning. Don't go home!"

Mrs. Helen Davies cast on her feather-brained daughter a glance of severe reproof.

"Have you no sense of propriety, Lucile?" she warned. "Gail, very naturally, can not remain here under the circumstances. It does great credit to her that, immediately upon realising this horrible occurrence, she telegraphed to her mother, without consulting any of us, that she was returning."

"I just wanted to go home," said Gail, her chin quivering and her pretty throat tremulous with breath pent from sobbing.

"It'll all blow over, Gail," argued Uncle Jim, in deep distress because she was going so soon. If she had only stopped long enough to pack up, they might have persuaded her to stay. "Just forget it, and have a good time."

"Jim," ordered the stern voice of Aunt Helen, "will you be kind enough to see if any one is out in front?"

"Certainly," agreed Jim, wondering why his wife's sister was suddenly so severe with him.

"It's time to start," called Ted, with practised wisdom allowing ten minutes for good-byes, parting instructions, and forgotten messages.

The adieus were said. Aunt Grace, clasping Gail in her arms, began to sob, out of a full heart and a general need for the exercise. Gerald Fosland took the hand of his wife and kissed it, in most gallant fashion.

"I shall miss you dreadfully, my dear," he stated.

"I shall be thinking of you," responded Arlene, adjusting her veil.

Mrs. Davies drew Arlene into the drawing room.

"It was so sweet of you to agree to accompany Gail," she observed. "It would be useless to attempt

to influence her now, but I look to you to bring her back in a week. Her prospects are really too brilliant to be interrupted by an unfortunate episode of this nature."

CHAPTER XV

BUT WHY WAS SHE LONESOME?

EVERYBODY was at the depot to meet Gail; just everybody in the world! It was midnight when the train rolled in, and, as she came toward the gate, the faces outside, with the high station lights beaming down upon their eagerness, were like a flashing dream of all the faces she had ever loved. Of course there was her mother, a little stiff, a little sedate, a little reserved, but, under her calm exterior, fluttering with a flood of pent-up emotion. There was her father, a particularly twinkling-eyed gentleman, a somewhat thinner, somewhat older, somewhat neater edition of Uncle Jim, and he had, of all things, her favourite collie, Taffy, perched high on his shoulder! It was from her father that Gail had her vivacity and from her mother her faculty of introspection. Dazed by the unexpected delight, and the pain, too, of seeing all these dear old faces, she was for picking them out in detail, when Taffy made a blur of them. Taffy, suddenly recognising his playfellow in the throng, first deafened Miles Sargent with a series of welcoming barks, and then began climbing up his back. Sargent, always gifted with the capacity for over-estimating his own powers, a quality which had permitted his brother Jim to slightly outrun him in the game of life, had fondly hoped that he could restrain Taffy by the firm hold of the forepaws over his shoulder; but collies are

endowed with a separate set of muscles for wriggling purposes alone, and the first thing Miles Sargent knew, Taffy had crawled right over him, and had kicked off from his cravat, and had shot straight through the outcoming throng, a flash of yelping brown and white, brushing over a woman with a basket, and landing against Gail with the force of all his lively affection.

That was only the beginning of the impetuosity with which she was received at home. She had never realised that she had quite so many friends, and even the people in the street seemed familiar, as she was bundled out to the car, with Arly smiling steadfastly in the background and remembered only at intervals. They looked more substantial and earnest and sincere and friendly, these people, than the ones with whom she had been recently associated. They were more polished in New York, more sure of themselves, more indifferent to the great mass of their fellow humanity, but here one could be trustful. It was so good to be home!

Of course Howard was there, just the same old Howard, and he hustled up to her with the same old air of proprietorship, quite as if nothing had ever happened to disturb their relations. It was he who took her by the arm and engineered her out to her father's car. At first she was puzzled by his air of having a right to boss her around, and then the reason flashed on her mind. Pride! Howard did not want their set to know that he was no longer drum major in the Sargent procession.

"There's a wad of roses at the house for you, Snapsy," her father informed her as the machine started, and his brown eyes twinkled until they almost seemed to be surrounded by a halo. "They're from number one, I think."

"Number one?" puzzled Gail, who had taken a folding seat so that she might occasionally pat Taffy, who sat up sedately with the chauffeur.

"Miles," protested Mrs. Sargent, trying to direct his glance toward Arly.

"Edward E. Allison," grinned Gail's father. "He must be a very active gentleman. Probably telephoned his own florist in New York to telegraph Marty here to supply you. Nothing has arrived from the other eight."

Gail had a mad impulse to search for her time table. She remembered now — could she ever forget it — that her nine slaves had been numbered!

"Dad!" she wailed. "You couldn't have seen that awful paper!"

"We receive the New York papers now at four p. m.," he informed her, with an assumption of local pride in the fact. "This morning's *Planet* had a wonderful circulation here. I think everybody in town has seen it."

Arly Fosland had the bad grace to giggle. Mrs. Sargent looked at her dubiously. She had, of course, implicit confidence in Gail's selection of friends, but nevertheless she was not one to make up her own mind too rapidly.

"Everybody's proud of you, Snapsy!" went on Miles Sargent. "That's a wonderful collection of slaves to have made in so short a time."

"Please don't, Dad!" begged Gail.

"For myself, I favour number five," continued her father, enjoying himself very much, and Arly Fosland made up her mind that she was going to feel very home-like in the Sargent house, at dinner times. "Number five is —"

"Miles!" and Mrs. Sargent put her hand comfortingly on Gail's knee, while she turned reproachful eyes on her husband.

"Why, Judith," protested Mrs. Sargent's husband, in mock surprise; "number five —"

"Dad, I'll jump out of this car!"

"— is the Reverend Smith Boyd, of Market Square Church, the wealthiest and most fashionable congregation in the world. Number six — Mrs. Fosland, I couldn't make out number six very well. I suppose you know him.

Arly shrieked.

"I can tell you all about them," she volunteered, judging that this was perhaps the best way to relieve Gail's embarrassment. "Number one, the gentleman who sent the flowers, is a good-looking bachelor of forty-five, whose specialty is in making big street car companies out of little ones, and Gail hadn't been in New York a week, when he took the first vacation he's had in ten years. He'll probably go back to work to-morrow morning. He was the hero of the wreck."

"No doubt a good provider," commented Mr. Sargent, gravely checking off number one.

Even Mrs. Sargent was smiling now, but Gail was looking interestedly at the old familiar street, and marvelling that it had changed so little. It seemed impossible that she had only been gone a few weeks. She was particularly not hearing the flippant conversation in the car.

"Number two is Dick Rodley," enumerated Arly, remembering vividly the grouping of the nine slaves. "He's the handsomest man in the world!"

"Probably fickle."

"Number three, Willis Cunningham. He wears a

beard. I'd rather talk about number four, Houston Van Ploon," and she babbled on with her descriptions of the nine slaves, until finally Gail laughed and helped her out.

Somehow, the returned wanderer felt lonely, even with three cars of friends following her home, as a guard of honour. That was a strange sensation. Everything was the same, all her friends were steadfast in their affection, and she was overjoyed to be back among them; yet she was lonely. Who could explain it?

Here was Main Street. Dear old busy Main Street, with its shops and its hotels and its brilliantly lighted drugstores, the latter only serving to accentuate the deserted blackness. She was sorry that she had not arrived at an earlier hour, when the windows would have been lighted and the streets busier with people; though, of course, it was always dull on Sunday night. Cricky! Sunday! She had an engagement with Houston Van Ploon to attend a concert to-night, and she had forgotten to send him word. He had been at Uncle Jim's, stiff as a ramrod and punctual to the second, of course.

Taffy, who had been whining his newly re-aroused distress over the absence of Gail, now suddenly remembered that she was home again, and turned around with a short, sharp bark. He stuck out his tongue and rolled it at her, laughing, and his tail flopped. He quivered all over.

Now up the avenue, the dear old wide avenue, with its double rows of trees and its smooth asphalt, glistening like sprinkling rain from the quartz sand embedded in its surface, and with the prosperous looking brown stone houses lining each side of the way, every house with its lawn and its shrubbery and its glass-doored vestibule. They were nearly all alike these houses, even

to lawns and shrubbery, except that some of them had no iron dogs in the grass, and others had no little white cupids holding up either a goose spouting water out of its mouth or an umbrella which furnished its own rain. They were dear houses, every one, ever so much more personal than the heartless residences of New York; and her friends lived in them. It was so good to be home!

She became more excited now. There was their own house just ahead, occupying nearly half the block, and slightly larger than the others! It was brilliantly lighted from the basement to the attic, and all the servants were either on the front steps or peeping from around the corner of the house, and old mammy Emma, who had cooked Gail's own little individual custard pies since she was a baby, had her apron to her eyes. Gail's heart was just plumb full! There was no place, oh, no place in all the world like home!

Taffy jumped out of the machine as it turned in at the gate, and ran up ahead to bark a proper welcome, and touched the top step with a circle like a whipsnapper, and was back again, a long brown and white streak bellying down to the grass, and prancing a circle around the machine, and leaping in the air to bark, and back up to the steps and back to the machine; then lay down in the grass and rolled over, and, jumping up, chased a cat out of the next yard, in the mere exuberance of joy; but was back again to crouch before Gail, and whine, as she stepped out of the car.

Old Plympton was there, the hollow-stomached black butler, whose long-tailed coat dropped straight from the middle of his back, and flapped against the bend of his knees when he walked. His voice trembled when he greeted Miss Gail, and old Auntie Clem, who had

tended Miss Gail when she was a little girl no bigger than that, and until the fancy French maid came, just politely took her young missus upstairs to her room, and took off those heavy shoes, and made her drink her thimble glass of hot-spiced port wine. It was so good to be home!

Of course her friends had piled into the house after her, a whole chattering mob of them, and, late as the hour was, Vivian Jennings opened the piano and rattled into Auld Lang Syne, which the company sang with a ringing zest! The tears filled Gail's eyes as she listened. They were such faithful, whole-hearted people back here! It was good to go away, now and then, just for the joy of coming home again; but one should not go too often. After all, this was a better life.

Auntie Clem triumphed. She had Miss Gail all fixed up before that fancy French maid had on her trifling little cap and her hair primped. Arly, choosing Auntie Clem instantly for her personal attendant on this brief visit, naturally refused to intrude further on the home coming, and expressed herself as frantically in love with her little blue bedroom and boudoir.

When Gail went downstairs, in a comfortable little red house gown which was tremendously artful in its simplicity, she found the whole jolly company in the big dining room, where Miles Sargent had insisted on opening something in honour of the happy event. She coloured as her father turned his twinkling eyes on her, but he did not take occasion to call her a slave driver or to tease her any further about the work of art which had driven her home. She reproached herself crossly for having suspected him of such a crudity. Of course he would not do that!

They had sandwiches, and olives, and cake, and

cookies — trust Mammy Emma for that — and nuts and fruit and bonbons, and coffee, and champagne. Everybody was excited, walking around with a sandwich in one hand and an olive in the other, joking with Gail, and complimenting her, and teasing her, but in every word and look and action, showing that they loved her.

She had a new knowledge of them, an understanding of what it is like to have a whole circle of friends who have grown up from childhood together. They understood each other, and knew each other's weaknesses and faults, so that they were not shocked when they saw evidences of them, and they knew each other's virtues, so that they did not overestimate anything and look for too much, and they were dependent upon each other and knew it, and they were loyal; that was it! Loyal! Loyal to the very core! It was good, so good to be home!

No one thought anything about it when Howard Clemmens stayed behind, after all the rest had gone home. Howard had always done that. It was his right.

Howard was distressed in his mind about several things, and, out of a habitual acquiescence in his old assumption of leadership, and because she was tired, and because she was tender of thought toward all her old friends, she answered his very direct questions. Yes, she had finished her visit. No, she was not engaged. That atrocious newspaper article had only been a regular Sunday paper social sensation. They fastened that sort of a story on some one at least once a year. These little matters settled, Howard was himself again. He was very glad that Gail had returned to her normal mode of existence, and now that all this

foolishness was over, he took the earliest opportunity to mention the little matter between them. Would Gail reconsider her answer to the question he had asked her in New York? He informed her fully as to the state of his affections, which had not changed in the least, and he rather expected that this magnanimous attitude on his part would meet with melting appreciation. He was very much astonished that it did not, and displeased when she refused him again. Confound it, he had not given her time to settle down!

She was only slightly troubled when he bade her good night. She was sorry that she could not see the matter as he did, but there was no trace of doubt in her mind. Somehow, Howard seemed rather colourless of late. He was a dear, good boy; but she was not the kind of a girl he needed.

With only as much trouble on her brow as could be smoothed away by her fingertips, she went back into the dining room, where her father, who liked to have a table near him, was enjoying an extra cup of coffee with his cigar, and shedding the mild disapproval of Mrs. Sargent, who foresaw a restless night for him. Gail, who had not spared time for food, poured herself a glass of water, picked up one of the delicious little chicken sandwiches, and sat down, within easy leaning distance of her father, for one of the good, old-time, comfortable family chats. Taffy curled around her feet, and the group was complete.

Somehow, that inexplicable feeling of loneliness returned to her, in the midst of this most dear intimacy. What was it? No one can form far ties without leaving behind some enduring thread of spiritual communication; for better or for worse.

CHAPTER XVI

GAIL AT HOME

“**I** HEAR Miss Gail’s back home.” It was the ice man. He had given her slivers of ice in the days when she had wished that she were a boy.

“Yassum.” Mammy Emma. She said “Yassum” to everybody; men, women, and children.

Gail, still snuggled in the pillows, smiled affectionately, and knew what time it was. She reached lazily out and pressed the button.

“Prettier than ever, I suppose.” A slam and a bang and a rattle of crockery.

“Heaps.” The clink of a muffin pan. Gail knew the peculiar sound from that of all the other pans in the house. “I thought I done tole you yeahs ago to saw that ice straight. Does it fit that away?”

“All right, Emma.” The slam of a lid. “I’ll remember it next time. Miss Gail home for good?”

“Praise the Lawd, yes.”

The clank of ice tongs.

“She’s a fine girl!” This with profound conviction. “She didn’t get her head turned and marry any of those rich New Yorkers.”

“She could if she’d ’a’ wanted to!” This indignantly.

“Sure she could.” Sounds of a heavy booted ice-man coming down the steps of the kitchen porch. “New

York papers said she could have her pick; but she come back home."

Gail's maid came in, a neat French girl who had an artist's delight in her. She shivered and closed the windows.

"Arly!"

"Good morning," came a cheerful voice through three open doors. "I'm up hours," and Arly trotted in, fresh-eyed and smiling, clad in a rich blue velvet boudoir robe and her black hair braided down her back. "I peeped in a few minutes ago, but you were sound asleep. I want my coffee."

"You poor infant," and Gail promptly slid two pink feet out of bed to be slipped by Nanette. "I'll be ready in a minute. Why didn't you ring?"

"I did. Auntie Clem was up and took all the burden of living away from me. I wouldn't have coffee by myself, though. I get that at home," and there was the slightest trace of wistfulness in her tone.

"Call Clem again," directed Gail. "Shall we have it in your dressing room or mine?"

"All over both suites," laughed Arly. "I shall never have enough of these beautiful little rooms," and she hurried back to her own quarters, to summons, once more, the broadly smiling face of Auntie Clem.

That was the beginning of the first morning at home, with every delightful observance just as it had used to be; first the fragrant coffee, and the pathetically good hot muffins and jam; then the romping, laughing, splashing process of dressing; then interrupted by a visit from Mrs. Sargent, and from Taffy, and from Vivian Jennings, who lived next door, and from Madge Frazier, who had stayed the night with Vivian; then a race out to the stables, to say good morning to the

horses, and laughing with moist eyes, hear their excited whinnies of greeting, and slip them lumps of sugar; then to the kennels to be half smothered by the eager collies; then over to Vivian's, to surround deaf old grandmother Jennings with the flowers she loved best, the faces of young girls; then back to the house and the telephone, for a cheery good morning to everybody in the world, beginning with Dad, who was already plugging away in his office, the morning half gone, and looking forward to lunch.

Breakfast at eleven, a brisk horseback ride, a change, and Gail's little grey electric was at the door. There was a tremendous lot of shopping to be done. To begin with, sixteen new hair ribbons, and nine fancy marbles, not the big ones that you can't use, but the regular unattainable fifteen centers, and twenty-five pears, and twenty-five small boxes of candy, and eleven pound packages of special tea, and six pound packages of special tobacco, and one quart of whiskey, and eighteen bunches of red carnations, five to the bunch, five grouping better than four or six. None of these things were to be delivered. Gail piled them all in her coupé, and, after saying "howdydo" to about everybody on Main Street, and feeling immensely uplifted thereby, she inserted Arly in among the carnations and pears and tobacco and things, and whirled her out to Chickentown, which was the actively devilish section of the city allotted to Gail's church work.

There were those of the guild who made of this religious duty a solemn and serious task, to be entered upon with sweet piety and uplifting words; but Gail had solved her problem in a fashion which kept Chickentown from hating her and charity. She distributed flowers and pears and tobacco and things, and perfectly

human smiles, and a few commonsense observations when they seemed to be necessary, and scoldings where they seemed due, and it was a lasting tribute to her diplomacy and popularity that all the new born babies in the district were named either Gail or Gale.

Chickentown lay in a smoky triangle, entirely surrounded by railroad yards and boiler factories and packing houses and the like, and it was as feudal in its instincts as any stronghold of old. Its womenfolk would not market where the Black Creek women marketed, its men would not drink in the same saloons, and its children came home scarred and prowled from gory battles with the Black Creek gang; yet, in their little cottages and in their tiny yards was the neatness of local pride, which had sprung up immediately after Gail had inaugurated the annual front yard flower prize system.

No sooner had the familiar coupé crossed the Black Creek bridge than a yell went up, which could be heard echoing and reverberating from street to street throughout the entire domain of Chickentown! One block inside the fiefdom, the progress of the car was impeded by exactly twenty-five children. By some miracle they all arrived at nearly the same time, the only difference being that those who had come the farthest were the most out of breath. Gail jumped out among them, and twenty-five right hands went straight up in the air. She inspected the hands critically, one by one, and, by that inspection alone, divided the mobs into two groups, the clean handed ones, who were mostly girls, and the dirty-handed ones, who looked sorry. She shook hands with the first group, and she smiled on

both, and she distributed hair ribbons and marbles and pears and candy with cordial understanding.

"It doesn't do for me to be away so long," she confessed, looking them over regretfully. "I don't believe you are as clean."

Those who were as clean looked consciously hurt, but for the most part they looked guilty; and Gail apologised individually, to those who merited it.

"Now we'll hear the troubles," she announced; "and you must hurry. The cleanest first."

Twenty-five hands went up, and she picked out the cleanest, a neat little girl with yellow hair and blue eyes and a prim little walk, who shyly came forward alone out of the group and wiggled her interlocked fingers behind her, while Gail sat in the door of her coupé and held her court.

A half-whispered conversation; a genuine trouble, and some sound and sensible advice. Yellow Hair did not like her school-teacher; and what was she to do about it? A difficult problem that, and while Gail was inculcating certain extremely cautious lessons of mingled endurance and diplomacy, which would have been helpful to grown-ups as well as to yellow-haired little girls, and which Gail reflected that she might herself use with profit, Arly, with an entirely new sort of smile in her softened eyes, walked over to the chattering group, all of whom had troubles to relate, and asked a boy to have a bill changed for her into quarter dollars. The boy looked at his hand.

"I guess I won't be next for a long time," and taking the bill ran for the candy shop, which was nearest. There were seven places of retail business in Chicken-town, and since they dealt mostly in coppers, he expected to be a long time on this errand.

Arly watched Gail handle the case of a particularly black-eyed little girl, whose brother was getting too big to play with her any more; and she grew wistful.

"Do you mind if I hear a few troubles, Gail?" she requested.

"Help yourself," was the laughing reply. "I think there's enough to go around."

"I'll begin at the other end," decided Arly. "Put up your hands, kiddies," and they went up slowly. She conscientiously picked the dirtiest one, but the boy who owned it came forward with a reluctance which was almost sullen.

"I druther tell Miss Gail," he frankly informed her.

"Of course," Arly immediately agreed, smiling down into his eyes with more charm than she had seen fit to exert on anybody in many months. "But you can tell Miss Gail about it afterwards, if you like, or you might tell me your littlest trouble and save your biggest one for Miss Gail."

"I ain't got but one," responded the boy, and he looked searchingly into Arly's black eyes. Her being pretty, like Gail, was a recommendation.

"There's a kid over in Black Creek that I used to lick; but now he's got me faded."

From his intensity, this was a serious trouble, and Arly considered it seriously.

"Does he fight fairly?" she asked, and that one question alone showed that she knew the first principles of human life and conduct, which was rare in a girl or woman of any type.

He came a step closer, and looked up into her eyes with all his reservation gone.

"Yessum," he confessed, and there was something of a clutch in his throat which would never grow up to

be a sob, but which would have been one in a girl. He'd rather have lied, but you couldn't get any useful advice that way.

"Maybe he's growing faster than you."

"Yessum. I eat all the oatmeal they give me, and I take trainin' runs every evening after school, clear up to Scraggers Park and back; but it don't do any good."

Arly pondered.

"When does he lick you?" she asked.

"Right after supper when he catches me."

"Do you play all day?"

"I go to school."

"Baseball?"

"Yessum. Baseball, and one-old-cat, and two-old-cat, and rounders, and marbles, and prisoner's base, and high-spy, but mostly baseball and marbles."

Arly studied the future citizen with the eye of a practical physical culturist, who knew exactly how she had preserved her clear complexion and lithe figure. In spite of his sturdy build, there was not enough protuberance to his chest, and, though his cheeks were full enough, there was a hollow look about his jaws and around his eyes.

"You're over-trained," she decisively told him. "You mustn't play marbles very often, or very long at a time, because that stooping over in the dust isn't good for you, and you mustn't take your training runs up to that park. The other boy licks you because you're all tired out. I don't believe it's because he's a better fighter."

That boy breathed with the sigh of one freed from a mighty burden, and the eyes which looked up into Arly's were almost swimming with gratitude.

"She's all right," he told the next candidate. "She's

a pippin! Say, do you know what's the matter with me? I'm over-trained," and he smacked his chest resounding whacks and felt of his biceps.

There were troubles of all sorts and shapes and sizes, and Arly bent to them more concentrated wisdom than she had been called upon to display for years. It was a new game, one with a live zest, and Gail had invented it. Her admiration for Gail went up a notch. One boy was not so funny as his brother, and was never noticed; another had to eat turnips; and Arly's only little girl, for she had started at the boy end, couldn't have little slippers that pinched her feet!

"I'm glad I came home with you," commented Arly, when she had finished her court and had distributed her money, which Gail had permitted her just this once, and they had driven up the block attended by an escort of exactly twenty-five. "It makes me think, and I'd almost forgotten how."

"It makes me think, too," confessed Gail, very seriously. "Suppose I should go away. They'd go right on living, but I like to flatter myself that I'm doing more good for them than somebody else could do." Why that thought had worried her she could not say. She was home to stay now, except for the usual trips.

"You'd find the same opportunities anywhere," Arly quickly assured her.

"Yes, but they wouldn't be these same children," worried Gail. "I'd never know others like I know these."

"No," admitted Arly slowly. "I think I'll pick out a few when I go back home. I've often wondered how to do it, without having them think me a fool or a nosy, but you've solved the problem. You're tremendously clever."

"Here's Granny Jones's," interrupted Gail, with a

smile for the compliment. "Don't come in, for she's my worst specimen. She's a duty," and taking some carnations and a package of tea, she hurried away.

Flowers and tea for the old ladies, tobacco and flowers for the old men, and the bottle of whiskey for old Ben Jackson, to whom his little nip every morning and night was a genuine charity, though one severe worker left the guild because Gail persisted in taking it to him.

At the house they found silver-haired old Doctor Mooreman, the rector of the quaintly beautiful little chapel up the avenue, and he greeted Gail with a smile which was a strange commingling of spiritual virtue and earthly shrewdness.

"Well, how's my little pagan?" he asked her, in the few minutes they had alone.

"Worse than ever, I'm afraid," she confessed. "I suppose you're asking about the state of my mind and the degree of my wickedness."

"That's it exactly," agreed the Reverend Doctor, smiling on her fondly. "Are you still quarrelling with the Church, because it prefers to be respectable rather than merely good?"

"I'm afraid so," she laughed. "I still don't understand why Hell is preached when nobody believes it; nor why we are told the material details of a spiritual Heaven, when no one has proved its existence except by ancient literature; nor why an absolutely holy man whose works are all good, from end to end of his life, can't go to Heaven if he doubts the divinity of the Saviour; nor why so much immorality is encouraged in the world by teaching that marriage itself is sinful; nor why a hundred other things, which are necessarily the formulas of man, are made a condition of the worship of the heart. You see, I'm as bad as ever."

The smile of Doctor Mooreman was a pleasant sight to behold.

"You're in no spiritual difficulties," he told her. "You're only having fun with your mind, and laying tragic stress on the few little innocent fictions which were once well-meant and useful."

Gail looked at him in astonishment.

"I never heard you admit that much!" she marvelled.

"You're approaching years of discretion," laughed her old rector. "All these things are of small moment compared with the great fact that the Church does stand as a constant effort to inculcate the grace of God. The young are prone to require roses without a blemish, but even God has never made one."

"I don't understand," she puzzled. "You're not combatting me on any of these things as you used to," and it actually worried her.

"Let me whisper something to you," and the Reverend Doctor Mooreman, whose face had the purity which is only visible in old age, leaned forward, with his eyes snapping. "I don't believe a lot of them myself; but Gail, I believe much in the grace of God, and I believe much in its refining and bettering influence on humanity, so to the people who would discard everything for the reason of one little flaw, I teach things I don't believe; and my conscience is as clean as a whistle."

"You're a darling old fraud!" Gail's mind was singularly relieved. She had worried how a man of Doctor Mooreman's intelligence could swallow so many of the things which were fed him in his profession. The conversation had done her good. It tempered her attitude toward certain things, but it did not change her

steadfast principle that the Church would be better off if it did not require the teachings of tenets and articles of faith which were an insult to modern intelligence.

Had she been unfair with the Reverend Smith Boyd? She could not shake off that thought. She must tell him the attitude of Doctor Mooreman. That is, if she ever saw him again. Of course she would, however.

CHAPTER XVII

SOMETHING HAPPENS TO GERALD FOSLAND

THERE was something radically wrong with the Fosland household. Gerald's man had for years invariably said: "Good morning, sir; I hope you slept well, sir." This time he merely said: "Good morning, sir"; and he forgot the salt. What was the matter with the house? With the exception of William's slip, the every morning programme was quite as usual. Gerald arose, had his plunge, his breakfast, read his mail and his paper, went for a canter in the Park, had luncheon at the Papyrus Club, and unless his morning engagement slip had shown him some social duty for the afternoon, he did not see Mrs. Fosland until he came down, from the hands of William, dressed for dinner.

One can readily see that no deviation from this routine confronted Gerald Fosland this morning. He had had his plunge and his breakfast, his mail and his paper laid before him, and yet there was something ghastly about the feel of the house. It was as if some one were dead! Gerald Fosland made as radical a deviation from his daily life as William had done. He left his mail unopened, after a glance at the postmark; he left his paper unread, and he started for his canter in the Park a full half hour early!

He arrived at the Papyrus Club a full half hour early, and sat in the dimmest corner of the library,

taking himself seriously in hand. Somehow, he was not quite fit, not quite up to himself. It seemed desperately lonely in the Club. There were plenty of fellows there, but they were merely nodders. They were not the ones who came at his hour. He brightened a shade as Tompkinson came in five minutes early. He was about to wonder if all the world had started a trifle early this morning, when he remembered that, ordinarily on his arrival, he found Tompkinson there. He could not analyse why this should be such a relief to him, unless it was that he found mere normality comforting to-day.

"Good-morning, Fosland," drawled Tompkinson. "Beautiful weather."

"Yes," said Gerald, and they sat together in voiceless satisfaction until Connors came in.

"Good-morning," observed Connors. "Beautiful weather."

"Yes," replied Fosland and Tompkinson, and Connors sat.

"Depressing affair of Prymm's," presently remarked Tompkinson, calling a boy for the customary appetiser.

"Rotten," agreed Connors, with some feeling. All his ancestors had been Irish, and it never quite gets out of the blood.

"I haven't heard," suggested Fosland, with the decent interest one club-fellow should have in another.

"Wife went to Italy with the sculptor who made her portrait; Carmelli, that's the name. Intense looking fellow, you know. Prymm had him here at the club."

"You don't tell me." Gerald felt an unusual throb of commiseration for Prymm. "Mighty decent chap."

"Yes, Prymm's all cut up about it," went on Tomp-

kinson. "Has a sort of notion he should kill the fellow, or something of the kind."

"Why?" demanded Connors, with some feeling again. Connors was a widower, and Fosland suddenly remembered, though he could not trace a connection leading to the thought, that Connors had not been a frequenter of the club until after the death of his wife. "Prymm's a thoroughly decent chap, but he was so wasteful."

This being a new word in such connection, both Fosland and Tompkinson looked at Connors inquiringly.

"I hadn't noticed." This Tompkinson.

"Wasteful of Mrs. Prymm," explained Connors. "She is a beautiful young woman, clever, charming, companionable, and, naturally, fond of admiration. Prymm admired her. He frequently intimated that he did. He admired his horse, and an exceptional Botticelli which hung in his music-room, but his chief pleasure lay in their possession. He never considered that he should give any particular pleasure to the Botticelli, but he did to the horse."

Gerald Fosland was aware of a particular feel of discomfort. Rather heartless to be discussing a fellow member's intimate affairs this way.

"It is most unfortunate," he commented. "Shall we go down to lunch?"

In the hall they met Prymm, a properly set up fellow, with neatly plastered hair and an air of unusually perfect grooming. He presented the appearance of having shaved too closely to-day.

"Good-morning," said Prymm. "Beautiful weather."

Inconsiderate of Prymm to show up at the club. A trifle selfish of him. It put such a strain on his fel-

low members. Of course, though, he had most of his mail there. He only stopped for his mail, and went out.

"You'll be in for the usual Tuesday night whist, I dare say," inquired Tompkinson perfunctorily.

"Oh yes," remembered Fosland, and was thoughtful for a moment. "No, I don't think I can come. Sorry." He felt the eye of Connors fixed on him curiously.

On Fosland's book was a tea, the date filled in two weeks ago; one of those art things to which men are compelled. Arly had handed it to him, much like a bill for repairs, or a memorandum to secure steamer tickets. He drove home, and dressed, and when William handed him his hat and gloves and stick he laid them on the table beside him, in his lounging room, and sat down, looking patiently out of the window. He glanced at his watch, by and by, and resumed his inspection of the opposite side of the street. He stirred restlessly, and then he suddenly rose, with a little smile at himself. He had been waiting for word from Mrs. Fosland, that she was ready. For just a few abstracted moments he had forgotten that he was to pay the social obligations of the house of Fosland entirely alone.

He picked up his hat and gloves and stick, and started to leave the room. As he passed the door leading to Arly's apartments, he hesitated, and put his hand on the knob. He glanced over his shoulder, as a guilty conscience made him imagine that William was coming in, then he gently turned the knob, and entered. A tiny vestibule, and then a little French-grey salon, and then the boudoir, all in delicate blue, and sweet with a faint, delicate, evasive fragrance which was like

the passing of Arly. Something made him stand, for a moment, with a trace of feeling which came to awe, and then he turned and went out of the terribly solemn place. He did not notice, until afterwards, that he had tiptoed.

Gerald Fosland had never been noted for brilliance, but he was an insufferable bore at the art tea. People asked him the usual polite questions, and he either forgot that they were talking or answered about something else, and he entirely mislaid the fragments of art conversation which he was supposed to have put on with his ascot. Nearly every one asked about Arly, and several with more than perfunctory courtesy. He had always known that Arly was very popular, but he had a new perception, now, that she was extremely well liked; and it gratified him.

Occupied with his own reflections, which were not so much thought as a dull feeling that he was about to have a thought, he nevertheless felt that this was a rather agreeable gathering, after all, until he accidentally joined a group which, with keen fervour, was discussing the accident to Prymm. He had a general aversion to gossip anyhow, and shortly after that he went home.

He wrote some letters, and, when it grew dark, he rang for William.

"I shall remain in for dinner to-night," he observed, and mechanically took up the evening paper which the quiet William laid before him. A headline which made his hand tremble, caught his eye, and he dropped the paper. Prymm had shot himself.

No tragedy had ever shaken Gerald Fosland so much as this. Why, he had met Prymm only that noon. Prymm had said: "Good morning, beautiful weather."

For a moment Fosland almost changed his mind about remaining in for dinner, but, after all, the big panelled dining-room, with its dark wainscoting and its heavily carved furniture and its super-abundant service, was less lonely than the club. The only words which broke the silence of the dim dining-room during that dinner, were: "Sauce, sir?"

Gerald took his coffee in his lounging room, and then he went again to Arly's door. He turned before he opened it, and tossed his cigarette in the fireplace. He did not enter by stealth this time. He walked in. He even went on to the dainty blue bedroom, and looked earnestly about it, then he went back to the boudoir and seated himself on the stiff chair in which he had, on rare occasions, sat and chatted with her. He remained there perhaps half an hour. Suddenly he arose, and called for his limousine, and drove to Teasdale's. They were out, he was told. They were at Mr. Sargent's, and he drove straight there. Somehow, he was glad that, since they were out, they had gone to Sargent's. He was most anxious to see Lucile.

"Just in time to join the mourners, Gerald," greeted Ted. "We're doing a very solemn lot of Gailing."

"I'll join you with pleasure," agreed Gerald, feeling more at home and lighter of heart here than he had anywhere during the day. Lucile seemed particularly near to him. "Have you any intimation that Gail expects to return soon?"

"None at all," stated Aunt Helen, with a queer mixture of sombreness and impatience. "She only writes about what a busy time they are having, and how delightfully eager her friends have been about her, and how popular Arly is, and such things as that."

"Arly is popular everywhere," stated Gerald, and

Lucile looked at him wonderingly, turning her head very slowly towards him.

"What do you hear from Arly?" she inquired, holding up her hand as if to shield her eyes from the fire, and studying him curiously from that shadow.

"Much the same," he answered; "except that she mentions Gail's popularity instead of her own. She had her maid send her another trunkful of clothing, I believe," and he fell to gazing into the fireplace.

"I am very much disappointed in Arly," worried Aunt Helen. "I sent Arly specifically to bring Gail back in a week, and they have been gone nine days!"

"I'm glad they're having a good time," observed Jim Sargent. "She'll come back when she gets ready. The New York pull is something which hits you in the middle of the night, and makes you get up and pack."

"Yes, but the season will soon be over," worried Aunt Helen. "Gail's presence here at this time is so important that I do not see how she can neglect it. It may affect her entire future life. A second season is never so full of opportunities as the first one."

"Oh nonsense," laughed Jim. "You're a fanatic on match-making, Helen. What you really mean is that Gail should make a choice out of the matrimonial market before it has all been picked over."

"Jim," protested Mrs. Sargent, the creases of worry appearing in her brow. Her husband and sister had never quarrelled, but they had permitted divergences of opinion, which had required much mutual forbearance.

"A spade is a spade," returned Jim. "I think it's silly to worry about Gail's matrimonial prospects. Whenever she's ready to be married, she'll look them all over, and pick out the one who suits her. All she'll

have to say is 'Eeny-meeny-miny-moe, you're it,' and the fellow will rush right out and be measured for his suit."

"Just the same, I'd rather she'd be here when she counts out," laughed Lucile.

"So would I," agreed Jim; "but, after all, there are good men everywhere. Girls get married out in the middle-west as well as here, and live happily ever after."

"They grow fine men out there," stated Mrs. Sargent, with a complimentary glance at her husband. She had never wavered in her opinion of that fine man.

"Right you are," agreed Sargent heartily. "They have not the polish of eastern men perhaps, but they have a strength, and forcefulness, and virility, which carries them through. There are men out there, stacks of them, who would appeal to any bright and vivacious woman, sweep her off her feet, carry her away by storm, and make her forget a lot of things. If any handsome woman is unappreciated in New York, all she has to do is to go out to the middle-west."

Lucile, listening to the innocently blundering speech of Gail's proud uncle, watched Gerald with intense interest. She could scarcely believe the startling idea which had popped into her head! Gerald's only apparent deviation from his normal attitude had consisted in abstractedly staring into the fire, instead of paying polite attention to every one, but that he had heard was evidenced by the shifting glance he gave Sargent. Otherwise he had not moved.

"You scare me," said Lucile, still watching Gerald. "I'm not going to leave Gail out there any longer. I'm going to have her back at once."

Gerald raised his head immediately, and smiled at her.

"Splendid," he approved. "Fact of the matter is," and he hesitated an instant, "I'm becoming extremely lonesome."

Even Ted detected something in Gerald's tone and in his face.

"It's time you were waking up," he bluntly commented. "I should think you would be lonely without Arly."

"Yes, isn't it time," agreed Gerald, studying the matter carefully. "You know, both having plenty of leisure, there's never been any occasion for us to travel separately before, and, really, I miss her dreadfully."

"I think I'll have to get her for you, Gerald," promised Lucile, removing her hand from in front of her eyes, and smiling at him reassuringly. She could smile beautifully just now. The incredible thing she had thought she detected was positively true, and it made her excitedly happy! Gerald Fosland had been in love with his wife, and had never known it until now!

"If you can work that miracle, and bring Gail back with her, you'll spread sunshine all over the place," declared Jim Sargent. "It's been like a funeral here since she went home. You'd think Gail was the most important section of New York. Everybody's blue; Allison, Doctor Boyd; everybody who knew her inquires, with long faces, when she's coming back!"

"What do you propose?" inquired Mrs. Helen Davies, with a degree of interest which intimated that she was quite ready to take any part in the conspiracy.

"I have my little plan," laughed Lucile. "I'm going to send her an absolutely irresistible reminder of New York!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MESSAGE FROM NEW YORK

IT was good to be home! Gail wondered that she could ever have been content away from the loving shelter of her many, many friends. She had grown world weary in all the false gaiety of New York! She was disillusioned! She was blasé. She was tired of frivolity; and she immediately planned or enthusiastically agreed to take part in a series of gaieties which would have made an average hard-working man anticipate them with an already broken constitution.

The house was full of them, morning, noon and night; young girls, sedate and jolly, and all of them excitedly glad that Gail was among them again; and young men, in all the degrees from social butterflies to plodding business pluggers, equally glad.

Good comfortable home folks these, who were deliciously nice to the stately black-haired Arly, and voted her a tremendous beauty, and stood slightly in awe of her. The half cynical Arly, viewing them critically, found in them one note of interesting novelty; a certain general clean-hearted wholesomeness, and, being a seeker after the unusual, and vastly appreciative, she deliberately cultivated them; flattering the boys, but not so much as to make the other girls hate her. To the girls she made herself even more attractive, because she liked them better. She complimented them individually on the point of perfection for which each girl

most prided herself; she told them that they were infinitely more clever than the women of New York, and better looking, in general; for the New York women were mostly clothes and make-up; and, above all, she envied them their truer lives!

No group of young people could resist such careful work as that, especially when performed by a young woman so adroit and so attractive, and so well gowned; so they lost their awkwardness with her, which removed any sense of discomfort Gail might have felt, which was the aim to be accomplished. In those first few days Gail was the happiest of all creatures, in spite of the fact that the local papers had carried a politer echo of that despicable slave story. At nights, however, beginning with the second one, when the girls had retired to the mutual runway of their adjoining suites, the conversation would turn something like this.

"Let's see, this is the seventeenth, isn't it?" thus Arly.

"Yes; Tuesday," concentratedly selecting a chocolate, the box of which bore a New York name.

"Mrs. Matson's ice skating ball is to-night." A sidelong glance at the busy Gail.

"Um-hum." A chocolate between her white teeth.

"She always has such original affairs."

"Doesn't she!" Gail draws her sandalled feet up under her and stretches down her pink negligee, so that she looks like a stiff little statue in tinted ivory.

"And such interesting people. That new artist is certain to be there. What's his name? Oh yes, Vlodow. I could adore him."

"You're a mere verbal adorer," laughs Gail, studying anxiously over the problem of whether she wants

another piece of chocolate or not. Allison had sent such good ones. "Vloddow eats garlic."

"That's why I adore him, from a distance. Of course all the nice regular fellows will be there; Dick Rodley, and Ted, and Houston, and — Oh, oh! I forgot to write Gerald," and with a swift passing kiss somewhere between Gail's ear and her chin, she hurries into her own dressing room, with a backward glance to make sure that Gail is staring, with softened brown eyes, down into her chocolate box, and seeing there amid the brown confections, the laughing, swirling skaters in Mrs. Matson's glistening ballroom. Dick, and Ted, and Houston, and Willis, Lucile and Marion, Flo Reynolds, and the gay little Mrs. Babbitt, and a host of others. There were some who would not be at that ball; Allison, and the Reverend Smith Boyd, and — Arlene has plenty of time to write her formally dutiful letter without disturbance.

Gail has letters, too, as the days wear on. She scarcely has time for them amid all the impromptu gaieties, but she does find a chance to read them; some of them twice. Of course there are letters from "home," a prim and still affectionate one from Aunt Helen Davies, and a loving one, full of worry about Gail's possible tonsilitis, from Aunt Grace, a hearty scrawl from Jim, a bubbling little note from Lucile, an absurd love letter from Ted, couched in terms of the utmost endearment, and winding up with the proposition to elope with her if she'd only come back. That was the tenor of all her letters; if she'd only come back! Bless their hearts, she loved them; and yes, longed for them, even here in the happy, sheltering environment of her own dear home and friends! There were still other

letters; a confidently friendly one from Allison, who sent her regularly candy and flowers on alternate days; a substantial one from Houston Van Ploon; a thoughtful one from Willis Cunningham; a florid one from Dick Rodley; nice little notes, calculated to relieve her embarrassment, from all her "slaves" except the missing Count; and a discussion from the Reverend Smith Boyd. That was one of those which she read more than once; for it was quite worth it.

"Dear Miss Sargent:

"This being our regular evening for discussion, I beg to remind you that on our last debate, I shall not call it a dispute, we had barely touched upon the necessity for ritual, or rather, to avoid any quibble over the word necessity, on my insistence for the need of a ritual, when we decided that it was better to sing for the balance of the evening. I was the more ready to acquiesce in this, as we had, for the first time, hit upon a theorem to which we could both subscribe; namely, that it is just as easy for the human mind to grasp the biblical theory of creation as to grasp the creation of the life-producing chaos out of which evolution must have proceeded."

Gail laid down the letter at this point and smiled, with dancing eyes. She could see the stern face of the young rector brightening with pleasure as she had herself propounded this thought, and she could revisualise his grave pleasure as he had clothed it in accurate words for them both. It was, as he had said, an extremely solid starting point, to which they could always return.

“That this belief is sufficient, even including a continuance of the omnipresent personal regard which we both admit to assume in that Creator, I deny. I can see your cheeks flush and your brown eyes sparkle as you come to this flat statement; and I am willing to answer for you that you object to my making so far-sweeping a statement, in the very beginning of what was to have been a slowly deductive process. You may not be wording it in just this manner, but this is, in effect, what you are saying.

“With much patience, I reply that you have not waited for me to finish, which, I must observe, in justice to myself, you seldom do.

“Kindly wait just a minute, please. You have thrown back your head, your brown hair tossing, your pointed chin uptilted, and a little red spot beginning to appear in your delicately tinted cheeks, but I hasten to remind you that, if we take up this little side matter of my unfortunate mention of one of your youthful proclivities, we shall forget entirely the topic under discussion. I apologise for having been so rude as to remind you of it, and beg to state that when I pause at a comma, you had heard but half a statement.

“At this point you remark that no discussion should be based upon a half statement, and I admit, with shame, that I am slightly indignant, for you have not yet permitted me to finish my original proposition. Now you are sitting back, with your slender white hands folded in your lap, and the toe of one of your little pointed slippers waving gently, your curved lashes drooping, and your eyes carelessly fixed on my cravat, which I can not see, but which I believe to have been tied with as much care as a gentleman should expend upon his attire.

"Miss Sargent, you leave me helpless. I feel a chill sensation in my cheeks, as if a cold draught had blown upon them. You are firmly resolved to let me talk without interruption for the next half hour, upon which you will give me a most adroit answer to everything I have said. Your answer will have all the effect of refuting my entire line of logic, without having given me an opportunity to defend the individual steps.

"I decline, with much patience, very much patience indeed, to lay myself open to this conclusion, not because of the undeserved sense of defeat it will force upon me, but because the matter at issue is too grave and important to be given a prejudiced dismissal.

"I can see you now, as I refuse to carry the subject further at this session. You stiffen in your chair, your eyes, which have seemed so carelessly indifferent, suddenly glow, and snap, and sparkle, and flash. The tiny red spots have deepened, enhancing the velvet of your cheeks. Your red lips curl. You impatiently touch back the waves of your rippling brown hair with your slender white hand, which turns so gracefully upon its wrist. You blaze straight into my eyes, and tell me that I have taken this means of avoiding the discussion, because I perceive in advance that I am beaten.

"Miss Sargent, I do not tell you that you are unfair and ungenerous to seize upon this advantage; instead, I bite my lip, and compel my countenance to befitting gravity, knowing that I should be above the petty emotions of anger, impatience, and offended pride; but humbly confessing, to myself, that I have not my nature under such perfect subjection as I should like to have.

"Consequently, I beg you to defer this step in our

logical deduction to another night, and turn, with grateful relief, to the music. I need not say how heartily I wish that you were here to sing with me.

“Yours earnestly,
“SMITH BOYD.”

Gail shrieked when she first read that letter, then she read it again and blushed. She had, as she came upon his initial flat statement of denial, felt a flush in her cheeks and a snap in her eyes. She had, as she read, stiffened with indignation, and relaxed in scornful disdain, and flashed with hot retort, in advance of his discernment that she would do so! She was flamingly vexed with him! On the third reading her eyes twinkled, and her red lips curved deliciously with humour, as she admired the cleverness which she had previously only recognised. In subsequent readings this was her continued attitude, and she kept the letter somewhere in the neighbourhood where she might touch it occasionally, because of the keen mental appreciation she had for it. Were her eyes really capable of such an infinite variety of expression as he had suggested? She looked in the glass to see; but was disappointed. They were merely large, and brown, and deep, and, just now, rather softened.

There was an impromptu party at Gail's house, a jolly affair, indeed. All her old, steadfast friends, you know, who were quite sufficient to fill her life; and this was the night of the gay little Mrs. Babbitt's affair in New York. How much better than those great, glittering, social pageants was a simple, wholesome little ball like this, with all her dear girl chums, in their pretty little Paris model frocks, and all the boys, in their shiny white fronts. No one had changed, not even impulsive

Howard Clemmens. Poor Howard! He knew now that his refusal was permanent and enduring, yet he came right to the front with his same assumption of proprietorship. She let him do it. You see, in all these years, the boys had tacitly admitted that Howard "had the inside track"; so, while they all admired and loved her, they stepped aside and permitted him to monopolise her. Back home there was a sort of esprit de corps like that, though it was sometimes hard on the girl. When Gail had flown home from the cruel world to the sheltering arms of her mother and her friends, she had firmly planned to set Howard in his proper place as a formal friend, and thereafter be free. There were quite a number of the boys who had, at one time or another, seemed quite worth cultivation. When she came to meet them again, however, with that same old brotherly love shining in their eyes, she somehow found that she did not care to be free. Anyhow, it would humiliate Howard to reduce him so publicly to the ranks, snip off his buttons and take his sabre, as it were; so she allowed him to clank his spurs, to the joy and delight of Arly.

This was the gayest party of which Gail had been the bright particular ornament since her return, and she quite felt, except for the presence of Arly, that she had fallen back into her old familiar life. Why, it seemed as if she had been home for ages and ages! There was the same old dance music, the Knippel orchestra, with the wonderfully gifted fat violinist, and the pallid pianist with the long hair, who had four children, and the 'cellist who scowled so dreadfully but played the deep passages so superbly, and clarionetist, whom every one thought should have gone in for concert work, and the grey-haired old basso player, who

never looked up and who never moved a muscle except those in his arms, one up and down and the other cross-wise; there was a new second violinist, a black-browed man who looked as if he had been disappointed in life, but second violinists always do.

At the end of the Sargent ballroom, where Gail's sedate but hospitable mother always sat until the "Home, Sweet Home" dance was ended, were the same dear, familiar palms, which Marty, the florist, always sent to everybody's house to augment the home collection. The gorgeous big one had a leaf gone, but it was sprouting two others.

Tremendously gay affair. Everybody was delighted, and said so; and they laughed and danced and strolled and ate ices, and said jolly nothings, and knew, justifiably, that they were nice, and clever, and happy young people; and Arly Fosland, with any number of young men wondering how old her husband was, danced conscientiously, and smiled immediately when any one looked at her. Gail also was dancing conscientiously, and having a perfectly happy evening. At about this hour there would be something near four hundred people in the ballroom, and the drawing-rooms, and the conservatory of Mrs. Babbitt's.

She was whirling near the balcony windows with a tall young friend who breathed, when there was an exclamation from a group of girls at the window. Vivian Jennings turned. She was a girl with the sort of eyes which, in one sweep, can find the only four-leaved clover in a forty-acre field.

"Gail!" she cried, almost dancing. "Gail! Do come and see it!"

Gail did not desert her partner; she merely started over to the window with one hand trailing behind her

as an indication to follow, and immediately, without looking around, she called:

“Arly! Where’s Arly?”

What she saw was this. A rich brown limousine, in which the dome light was brightly burning, had drawn up to the steps. Inside, among the rich brown cushions and hangings, and pausing to light a leisurely cigarette, sat the most wickedly handsome man in the world! He was black-haired, and black-moustached and black-goateed, and had large, lustrous, melting black eyes, while on his oval cheeks was the ruddy bloom of health. Every girl in the window sighed, as, with a movement which was grace in every changing line, he stepped out of the brilliantly lighted limousine, and came slowly up the steps, tall, slender, magnificent, in his shining silk hat and his flowing Inverness, and his white tie, and his pleated shirt front—Oh, everything; correct to the last detail, except for the trifling touches of originality, down to his patent leather tips! With a wave of careless ease he flung back his Inverness over one shoulder, and rang the bell!

“Dick!” cried a voice just behind Gail’s ear. Gail had not known that any one was leaning heavily on her shoulders, but now she and Arly, with one accord, turned and raced for the vestibule!

“You handsome thing!” cried Arly, as he stepped into the hall and held out a hand to each of them. “I’ve a notion to kiss you!”

“All right,” he beamed down on her, sparing another beam for Gail. No, Gail had not exaggerated in memory the magic of his melting eyes. It could not be exaggerated!

“There aren’t any words to tell you how welcome

you are!" said Gail, as the butler disappeared with his hat and Inverness.

"What on earth brought you here to bless us?" demanded Arly.

"I came to propose to Gail," announced Dick calmly, and took her hand again, bending down on her that wonderfully magnetic gaze, so that she was panic-stricken in the idea that he was about to proceed with his project right on the spot.

"Wait until after the dance," she laughingly requested, drawing back a step and blushing furiously.

"We're wasting time," protested Arly. "Hurry on in, Dick. We want to exhibit you."

"I don't mind," consented Dick cheerfully, and stepped through the doorway, where he created the gasp.

Eleven girls dreamed of his melting eyes that night; and Howard Clemmens lost his monopoly. Viewing Gail's victorious scramble with Arly for Dick's exclusive possession, Howard's friends unanimously reduced him to the ranks.

After the dance, Dick made good his threat with Gail, and formally proposed, urging his enterprise in coming after her as one of his claims to consideration; but Gail, laughing, and liking him tremendously, told him he was too handsome to be married, and sent him back home with a fresh gardenia in his buttonhole. That night Arly and Gail sat long and silently on the comfortable couch in front of Arly's fireplace, one in fluffy blue and the other in fluffy pink, and the one in fluffy blue furtively studying the one in fluffy pink from under her black eyelashes. The one in pink was gazing into the fire with far-seeing brown eyes, and was braid-

ing and unbraiding, with slender white fingers, a flowing strand of her brown hair.

"Gail," ventured the one in blue.

"Yes." This abstractedly.

"Aren't you a little bit homesick? I am."

"So am I!" answered Gail, with sudden animation.

"Let's go back!" excitedly.

"When?" and Gail jumped up.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RECTOR KNOWS

THE Reverend Smith Boyd came down to breakfast with a more or less hollow look in his face, and his mother, inspecting him keenly, poured his coffee immediately. There was the trace of a twinkle in her eyes, which were nevertheless extremely solicitous.

"How is your head?" she inquired.

"All right, thank you." This listlessly.

"Are you sure it doesn't ache at all?"

The Reverend Smith Boyd dutifully withdrew his mind from elsewhere, to consider that proposition justly.

"I think not," he decided, and he fell into exactly such a state of melancholy, trifling with his grape fruit, as Mrs. Boyd wished to test. She focussed her keen eyes on him microscopically.

"Miss Sargent is coming back to-night; on the sixteen train."

There was a clatter in the Reverend Smith Boyd's service plate. He had been awkward with his spoon, and dropped it. He made to pick it up, but reached two inches the other side of the handle. Mrs. Boyd could have laughed aloud for sheer joy. She made up her mind to do some energetic missionary work with Gail Sargent at the first opportunity. The foolish notions Gail had about the church should be removed. Mrs. Boyd had long ago studied this matter of religion, with a clear mind and an honest heart. It was

a matter of faith, and she had it; so why be miserable! Her reverie was broken by the calm and mellow voice of her son.

"That is delightful news," he returned with a frank enthusiasm which was depressing to his mother.

"I think I shall have the Sargents over to dinner," she went on, persisting in her hope.

"That will be pleasant." Frank again, carefree, aglow with neighbourly friendliness; even affection!

Mrs. Boyd had nothing more to say. She watched her son Tod start vigorously at his grape fruit, with a vivacity which seemed to indicate that he might finish with the rind. He drew his eggs energetically toward him, buttered a slice of toast, and finished his breakfast. Suddenly he looked at his watch.

"I have an extremely busy day before me," he told her briskly. "I have Vedder Court this morning, some calls in the afternoon, and a mission meeting at four-thirty. I might probably be late for dinner," and feeling to see if he had supplied himself with handkerchiefs, he kissed his mother, and was gone without another word about Gail! She could have shaken him in her disappointment. What was the matter with Tod?

The Reverend Smith Boyd sang as he went out of the door, not a tune or any set musical form, but a mere unconscious testing of his voice. It was quite unusual for him to sing on the way to Vedder Court, for he devoted his time to this portion of his duties because he was a Christian. He had sympathy, more than enough, and he both understood and pitied the people of Vedder Court, but, in spite of all his intense interest in the deplorable condition of humanity's weak and helpless, he was compelled to confess to himself that he loathed dirt.

Vedder Court was particularly perfect in its specialty this morning. The oily black sediment on its pavements was streaked with iridescence, and grime seemed to be shedding from every point of the drunken old buildings, as if they had lain inebriated in a soaking rain all night, and had just staggered up, to drip. They even seemed to leer down at the Reverend Smith Boyd, as if his being the only clean thing in the street were an impertinence, which they would soon rectify. It had been comparatively dry in the brighter streets of New York, but here, in Vedder Court, there was perpetual moisture, which seemed to cling, and to stick, and to fasten its unwholesome scum permanently on everything. Never had the tangle of smudge-coated children seemed so squalid; never had the slatternly women seemed so unfeminine; never had the spineless looking men seemed so shuffling and furtive and sodden; never had the whole of the human fungi in Vedder Court seemed so unnecessary, and useless, and, the rector discovered in himself with startled contrition, so thoroughly not worth saving, body or soul!

A half intoxicated woman, her front teeth missing and her colourless hair straggling, and her cheekbones gleaming with the high red of debauchery, leered up at him as he passed, as if in all her miserable being there could be one shred, or atom, to invite or attract. A curly-headed youngster, who would have been angelically beautiful if he had been washed and his native blood pumped from him, threw mud at the Reverend Smith Boyd, out of a mere artistic desire to reduce him to harmony with his surroundings. A mouthing old woman, with hands clawed like a parrot's, begged him for alms, and he was ashamed of himself that he gave it to her with such shrinking. The master could not

have been like this. A burly "pan handler" stopped him with an artificial whine. A cripple, displaying his ugly deformity for the benefit and example of the unborn, took from him a dole and a wince of repulsion.

"The poor ye have always with ye!" For ages that had been the excuse for such offences as Vedder Court. They were here, they must be cared for within their means, and no amount of pauperising charity could remove them from the scheme of things. In so far, Market Square Church felt justified in its landlordship, that it nursled squalor and bred more. Yet, somehow, the rector of that solidly respectable institution was not quite satisfied, and he had added a new expense to the profit and loss account in the ledger of this particular House of God. He had hired a crew of forty muscular men, with horses and carts, and had caused them to be deputed as sanitary police, and had given them authority to enter and clean; which may have accounted for the especially germ laden feel of the atmosphere this morning. Down in the next block, where the squad was systematically at work, there were the sounds of countless individual battles, and loud mouthings of the fundamental principles of anarchy. A government which would force soap and deodorisers and germicides on presumably free and independent citizens, was a government of tyranny; and it had been a particular wisdom, on the part of the rough-hewn faced man who had hired this crew, to select none but accomplished brick dodgers. In the ten carts which lined the curb on both sides, there were piled such a conglomerate mass of nondescript fragments of everything undesirable that the rector felt a trace better, as if he had erased one mark at least of the long black

score against himself. Somehow, recently, he had acquired an urgent impulse to clean Vedder Court!

He turned in at one of the darkest and most uninviting of the rickety stairways. He skipped, with a practised tread, the broken third step, and made a mental note to once more take up, with the property committee, the battle of minor repairs. He stopped at the third landing, and knocked at a dark door, whereupon a petulant voice told him to come in. The petulant voice came from a woman who sat in a broken rockered chair, with one leg held stiffly in front of her. She was heavy with the fat which rolls and bulges, and an empty beer pail, on which the froth had dried, sat by her side. On the rickety bed lay a man propped on one elbow, who had been unshaven for days, so that his sandy beard made a sort of layer on his square face. The man sat up at once. He was a trifle under-sized, but broad-shouldered and short-necked, and had enormous red hands.

"How are you to-day, Mrs. Rogers?" asked the rector, sitting on a backless and bottomless chair, with his hat on his knees, and holding himself small, with an unconscious instinct to not let anything touch him.

"No better," replied the woman, making her voice weak. "I'll never know a well day again. The good Lord has seen fit to afflict me. I ain't saying anything, but it ain't fair."

The Reverend Smith Boyd could not resist a slight contraction of his brows. Mrs. Rogers invariably introduced the Lord into every conversation with the rector, and it was his duty to wrestle with her soul, if she insisted. He was not averse to imparting religious instruction, but, being a practical man, he could not enjoy wasting his breath.

"There are many things we can not understand," he granted. "What does the doctor say about your condition?"

"He don't offer no hope," returned the woman, with gratification. "This knee joint will be stiff till the end of my days. If I had anything to blame myself with it would be different, but I ain't. I say my prayers every night, but if I'm too sick, I do it in the morning."

"Can that stuff!" growled the man on the bed. "You been prayin' once a day ever since I got you, and nothin's ever happened."

"I've brought you a job," returned the Reverend Smith Boyd promptly. "I have still ten places to fill on the sanitary squad which is cleaning up Vedder Court."

The man on the bed sat perfectly still.

"How long will it last?" he growled.

"Two weeks."

"What's the pay?"

"A dollar and a half a day."

The man shook his head.

"I can't do it," he regretted. "I don't say anything about the pay, but I'm a stationary engineer." He was interested enough in his course of solid reasoning to lay a stubby finger in his soiled palm. "If I take this two weeks' job, it'll stop me from lookin' for work, and I might miss a permanent situation."

The rector suppressed certain entirely human instincts.

"You have not had employment for six months," he reminded Mr. Rogers.

"That's the reason I can't take a chance," was the triumphant response. "If I'd miss a job through

takin' this cheap little thing you offer me, I'd never forgive myself; and you'd have it on your conscience, too."

"Then you won't accept it," and the rector rose, with extremely cold eyes.

"I'd like to accommodate you, but I can't afford it," and the man remained perfectly still, an art which he had brought to great perfection. "All we need is the loan of a little money while I'm huntin' work."

"I can't give it to you," announced the Reverend Smith Boyd firmly. "I've offered you an opportunity to earn money, and you won't accept it. That ends my responsibility."

"You'd better take it, Frank," advised the woman, losing a little of the weakness of her voice.

"You 'tend to your own business!" advised Mr. Rogers in return. "You're supposed to run the house, and I'm supposed to earn the living! Reverend Boyd, if you'll lend me two dollars till a week from Saturday —"

"I told you no," and the rector started to leave the room.

There was a knock at the door. A thick-armed man with a short, wide face walked in, a pail in one hand and a scrubbing brush in the other. On the back of his head was pushed a bright blue cap, with "Sanitary Police" on it, in tarnished braid. Mr. Rogers stood up.

"What do you want?" he quite naturally inquired.

"Clean up," replied the sanitary policeman, setting down his pail and ducking his head at the rector, then mopping his brow with a bent forefinger, while he picked out a place to begin.

"Nothin' doing!" announced Mr. Rogers, aflame with the dignity of an outraged householder. "Good-night!" and he advanced a warning step.

The wide set sanitary policeman paused in his survey long enough to wag a thick forefinger at the outraged householder.

"Don't start anything," he advised. "There's some tough mugs in this block, but you go down to the places I've been, and you'll find that they're all clean."

With these few simple remarks, he turned his back indifferently to Mr. Rogers, and, catching hold of the carpet in the corner with his fingers, he lifted it up by the roots.

"There's no use buckin' the government," Mr. Rogers decided, after a critical study of the sanitary policeman's back, which was extremely impressive. "It's a government of the rich for the rich. Has a poor man got any show? I'm a capable stationary engineer. All I ask is a chance to work — at my trade." This by an afterthought. "If you'll give me two dollars to tide me over —"

The Reverend Smith Boyd stepped out of the way of the sanitary policeman, and then stepped out of the door.

"And you call yourself a minister of the gospel!" Mr. Rogers yelled after him.

That was a sample of the morning's work, and the Reverend Smith Boyd felt more and more, as he neared luncheon time, that he merited some consideration, if only for the weight of the cross he bore. There were worse incidents than the abuse of men like Rogers; there were the hideous sick to see, and the genuinely distressed to comfort, and depthless misery to relieve; and any day in Vedder Court was a terrific drain, both upon his sympathies and his personal pocket.

He felt that this was an exceptionally long day.

Home in a hurry at twelve-thirty. A scrub, a com-

plete change of everything, and a general feeling that he should have been sterilised and baked as well. Luncheon with the mother who saw what a long day this was, then a far different type of calls; in a sedate black car this time, up along the avenue, and in and out of the clean side streets, where there was little danger of having a tire punctured by a wanton knife, as so often happened in Vedder Court. He called on old Mrs. Henning, who read her Bible every day to find knotty passages for him to expound; he called on the Misses Crasley, who were not thin but bony, who sat frozenly erect with their feet neatly together and their hands in their laps, and discussed foreign missions with greedy relish; he spent a half hour with plump Mrs. Rutherford, who shamelessly hinted that a rector should be married, and who was the worried possessor of three plump daughters, who did not seem to move well from the shelves; he listened to the disloyal confessions of Mrs. Sayers, who at heart liked her husband because he provided her so many faults to brood upon; he made brief visits with three successive parishioners who were sweet, good women with a normally balanced sense of duty, and with two successive parishioners who looked on the Kingdom of Heaven as a respectable social circle, which should be patronised like a sewing girls' club or any other worthy institution.

Away to Vedder Court again, dismissing his car at the door of Temple Mission, and walking inside, out of range of the leers of those senile old buildings, but not out of the range of the peculiar spirit of Vedder Court, which manifested itself most clearly to the olefactory sense.

The organ was playing when he entered, and the benches were half filled by battered old human rem-

nants, who pretended conversion in order to pick up the crumbs which fell from the table of Market Square Church. Chiding himself for weariness of the spirit, and comforting himself with the thought that one greater than he had faltered on the way to Golgotha he sat on the little platform, with a hymn book in his hand, and, when the prelude was finished, he devoted his wonderful voice to the blasphemy.

The organist, a volunteer, a little old man who kept a shoemaker's shop around the corner, and who played sincerely in the name of helpfulness, was pure of heart.

The man with the rough hewn countenance, unfortunately not here to-day, was also sincere in an entirely unspiritual sort of way; but, with these exceptions, and himself, of course, the rector knew positively that there was not another uncalled creature in the room, not one who could be reached by argument, sympathy, or fear! They were past redemption, every last man and woman; and, at the conclusion of the hymn, he rose to cast his pearls before swine, without heart and without interest; for no man is interested in anything which can not possibly be accomplished.

With a feeling of mockery, yet upheld by the thought that he was holding out the way and the light, not only seven times but seventy times seven times, to whatever shred or crumb of divinity might lie unsuspected in these sterile breasts, he strove earnestly to arouse enthusiasm in himself so that he might stir these dead ghosts, even in some minute and remote degree.

Suddenly a harsh and raucous voice interrupted him. It was the voice of Mr. Rogers, and that gentleman, who had apparently secured somewhere the two dollars to tide him over, was now embarked on the tide. He had taken just enough drinks to make him ugly, if that

process were possible, and he had developed a particularly strong resentment of the latest injustice which had been perpetrated on him. That injustice consisted of the Reverend Smith Boyd's refusal to lend him money till a week from next Saturday night; and he had come to expose the rector's shallow hypocrisy. This he proceeded to do, in language quite unsuited to the chapel of Temple Mission and to the ears of the ladies then present; most of whom grinned.

The proceedings which followed were but brief. The Reverend Smith Boyd requested the intruder to stop. The intruder had rights, and he stood on them! The Reverend Smith Boyd ordered him to stop; but the intruder had a free and independent spirit, which forbade him to accept orders from any man! The Reverend Smith Boyd, in the interests of the discipline without which the dignity and effectiveness of the cause could not be upheld, and pleased that this was so, ordered him out of the room. Mr. Rogers, with a flood of abuse which displayed some versatility, invited the Reverend Smith Boyd to put him out; and the Reverend Smith Boyd did so. It was not much of a struggle, though Mr. Rogers tore two benches loose on his way, and, at the narrow door through which it is difficult to thrust even a weak man, because there are so many arms and legs attached to the human torso, he offered so much resistance that the reverend doctor was compelled to practically pitch him, headlong, across the sidewalk, and over the curb, and into the gutter! The victim of injustice arose slowly, and turned to come back, but he paused to take a good look at the stalwart young perpetrator, and remembered that he was thirsty.

The Reverend Smith Boyd found himself standing in the middle of the sidewalk, with his fists clenched

and his blood surging. The atmosphere before his eyes seemed to be warm, as if it were reddened slightly. He was tingling from head to foot with a passion which he had repressed, and throttled, and smothered since the days of his boyhood! He had striven, with a strength which was the secret of his compelling voice, to drive out of him all earthly dross, to found himself on the great example which was without the cravings of the body; he had sought to make himself spiritual; but, all at once, this conflict had roused in him a raging something, which swept up from the very soles of his feet to his twirling brain, and called him man!

For a quivering moment he stood there, alive with all the virility which was the richer because of his long repression. He knew many things now, many things which ripened him in an instant, and gave him the heart to touch, and the mind to understand, and the soul to flame. He knew himself, he knew life, he knew, yes, and that was the wonderful miracle of the flood which poured in on him, he knew love!

He reached suddenly for his watch. Six-ten. He could make it! Still impelled by this new creature which had sprung up in him, he started; but at the curb he stopped. He had been in such a whirl of emotion that he had not realised the absence of his hat. He strode into the mission door, and the rays of the declining sun, struggling dimly through the dingy glass, fell on the scattered little assemblage — as if it had been sent to touch them in mercy and compassion — on the weak, and the poor, and the piteously crippled of soul; and a great wave of shame came to him; shame, and thankfulness, too!

He walked slowly up to the platform, and, turning to that reddened sunlight which bathed his upturned

face as if with a benediction, he said, in a voice which, in its new sweetness of vibration, stirred even the murky depths of these, the numb:

“Let us pray.”

CHAPTER XX

THE BREED OF GAIL

WHO was that tall, severely correct gentleman waiting at the station, with a bunch of violets in his hand, and the light in his countenance which was never on sea or land? It was Gerald Fosland, and he astonished all beholders by his extraordinary conduct. As the beautiful Arly stepped through the gates, he advanced with an entirely unrepressed smile, springing from the ball of his feet with a buoyancy too active to be quite in good form. He took Arly's hand in his, but he did not bend over it with his customary courteous gallantry. Instead, he drew her slightly towards him, with a firm and deliberate movement, and, bending his head sidewise under the brim of her hat, kissed her; kissed her on the lips!

Immediately thereafter he gave a dignified welcome to Gail, and with Arly's arm clutched tightly in his own, he then disappeared. As they walked rapidly away, Arly looked up at him in bewilderment; then she suddenly hugged herself closer to him with a jerk. As they went out through the carriage entrance, she skipped.

It was good to see Allison, big, strong, forceful, typical of the city and its mighty deeds. His eye had lighted with something more than pleasure as Gail stepped out through the gates of the station; something so infinitely more than pleasure that her eyes

dropped, and her hand trembled as she felt that same old warm thrill of his clasp. He was so overwhelming in his physical dominance. He took immediate possession of her, standing by while she greeted her uncle and aunt and other friends, and beaming with justifiably proud proprietorship. Gail had laughed as she recognised that attitude, and she found it magnificent after the pretensions of Howard Clemmens. The difference was that Allison was really a big man, one born to command, to sway things, to move and shift and re-arrange great forces; and that, of course, was his manner in everything. She flushed each time she looked in his direction; for he never removed his gaze from her; bold, confident, supreme. When a man like that is kind and gentle and considerate, when he is tender and thoughtful and full of devotion, he is a big man indeed!

She let him put her hand on his arm, and felt restful, after the greetings had been exchanged, as he led her out to the big touring car, asking her all sorts of eager questions about how she found her home and her friends, and if the journey had fatigued her, and telling her, over and over, how good she looked, how bright and how clear-eyed and how fresh-cheeked, and how charming in her grey travelling costume. She felt the thrill again as he took her hand in his to help her into the car, and she loved the masterful manner in which he cleared a way to their machine through the crowded traffic. In the same masterful air, he gently but firmly changed her from the little folding seat to the big soft cushions in the rear, beside her Aunt Grace.

The Reverend Smith Boyd was at the steps of the Sargent house to greet her, and her heart leaped as she

recognised another of the dear familiar faces. This was her world, after all; not that world of her childhood. How different the rector looked; or was it that she had needed to go away in order to judge her friends anew? His eyes were different; deeper, steadier and more penetrating into her own; and, yes, bolder. She was forced to look away from them for a moment. There seemed a warm eagerness in his greeting, as if everything in him were drawing her to him. It was indescribable, that change in the Reverend Smith Boyd, but it was not unexplainable; and, after he had swung back home, with the earnest promise to come over after dinner, she suddenly blushed furiously, without any cause, while she was talking of nothing more intense than the excellent physical condition of Flakes.

Gay little Mrs. Babbitt brought her husband, while the family group was still jabbering over its coffee, and after them came the deluge; Dick Rodley and the cherub-checked Marion Kenneth, and Willis Cunningham, and a host of others, including the Van Ploons, father, son, and solemn daughter. The callow youth who had danced with her three times was there, with a gardenia all out of proportion to him, and he sat in the middle of the Louis XIV salon, where he was excessively in everybody's road, and could feast on Gail, for the most of the evening, in numb admiration; for his point of vantage commanded a view into the library and all the parlours.

With a rapidity which was a marvel to all her girl friends, Gail had slipped upstairs and into a creamy lace evening frock without having been missed; and she was in this acutely harmonious setting when the Reverend Smith Boyd called, with his beautiful mother on his arm. The beautiful mother was in an excep-

tional flurry of delight to see Gail, and kissed that charming young lady with clinging warmth. The rector's eyes were even more strikingly changed than they had been when he had first met her on the steps, as they looked on Gail in her creamy lace, and after she had read that new intense look in his eyes for the second time that evening, she hurried away, with the license of a busy hostess, and cooled her face at an open window in the side vestibule. There was a new note in the Reverend Smith Boyd's voice; not a greater depth nor mellowness nor sweetness, but a something else. What was it? It was a call, that was it; a call across the gulf of futurity.

They came after her. Ted and Lucile had arrived. She was in a vortex. Dick Rodley hemmed her in a corner, and proposed to her again, just for practice, within eye-shot of a dozen people, and he did it so that onlookers might think that he was complimenting her on her clever coiffure or discussing a new operetta; but he made her blush, which was the intention in the depths of his black eyes. It seemed that she was in a perpetual blush to-night, and something within her seemed to be surging and halting and wavering and quivering! Her Aunt Helen Davies, rather early in the evening, began to act stiff and formal.

"Go home," she murmured to Lucile. "All this excitement is bad for Gail's beauty."

She felt free to give the same advice to the gay little Mrs. Babbitt, and the departure of four people was sufficient to remind the stiff Van Ploon daughter of the conventions. She removed the elder Van Ploon's eyes from Gail, and gathered up Houston, who was energetically talking horse with Allison. After that the exodus became general, until only the callow youth and Alli-

son and the Reverend Smith Boyd remained. The latter young gentleman had taken his flutteringly happy mother home early in the evening, and he had resorted to dulness with such of the thinning guests as had seemed disposed to linger.

It was Aunt Helen who, by some magic of adroitness, sent the callow youth on his way. He was worth any amount of money to which one cared to add ciphers, and his family was flawless except for him; but Aunt Helen had decisively cut him off her books, because he was so well fitted to be the last of his line. She thought she had better go upstairs after that, and she glanced into the music room as she passed, and knitted her brows at the tableau. The Reverend Smith Boyd, who seemed unusually fine looking to-night, stood leaning against the piano, watching Gail with an almost incendiary gaze. That young lady, steadily resisting an impulse to feel her cheek with the back of her hand, sat on the end of the piano bench furthest removed from the rector, and directed the most of her attention to Allison, who was less disconcerting. Allison, casting an occasional glance at the intense young rector, seemed preoccupied to-night; and Mrs. Helen Davies, pausing to take her sister Grace with her, walked up the stairs with a forefinger tapping at her well-shaped chin. She seemed to have reversed places with her sister to-night; for Mrs. Sargent was supremely happy, while Helen Davies was doing the family worrying.

She could have bid Allison adieu had she waited a very few minutes. He was a man who had spent a lifetime in linking two and two together, and he abided unwaveringly by his deductions. There was no mistaking the nature of the change which was so apparent in the Reverend Smith Boyd; but Allison, after care-

ful thought on the matter, was able to take a comparatively early departure.

"I'll see you to-morrow, Gail," he observed finally. Rising, he crossed to where she sat, and, reaching into her lap, he took both her hands. He let her arms swing from his clasp, and, looking down into her eyes with smiling regard, he gave her hands an extra pressure, which sent, for the hundredth time that night, a surge of colour over her face.

The Reverend Smith Boyd, blazing down at that scene, suddenly felt something crushing under his hand. It was the light runner board of the music rack, and three hairs, which had lain in placid place at the crown of his head, suddenly popped erect. Ten thousand years before had these three been so grouped, Allison would have felt a stone axe on the back of his neck, but as it was he passed out unmolested, nodding carelessly to the young rector, and bestowing on Gail a parting look which was the perfection of easy assurance.

The Reverend Smith Boyd wasted not a minute in purposeless hesitation or idle preliminary conversation.

"Gail!" he said, in a voice which chimed of all the love songs ever written, which vibrated with all the love passion ever breathed, which pleaded with the love appeal of all the dominant forces since creation. Gail had resumed her seat on the end of the piano bench, and now he reached down and took her hand, and held it, unresisting. She was weak and limp, and she averted her eyes from the burning gaze which beamed down on her. Her breath was fluttering, and the hand which lay in her lap was cold and trembling. "Gail, I love you!" He bent his head and kissed her hand. The touch was fire, and she felt her blood leap to it. "Gail

dear," and his voice was like the suppressed crescendo of a tremendous organ flute; "I come to you with the love of a man. I come to you with the love of one inspired to do great deeds, not just to lay them at your feet, but because you are in the world!" He bent lower, and tried to gaze into the brown eyes under those fluttering lashes. He held her hand more tightly to him, clasped it to his breast, oppressed her with the tremendous desire of his whole being to draw her to him, and hold her close, as one and a part of him for all time to come, mingling and merging them into one ecstatic harmony. "Gail! Oh, Gail, Gail!"

There was a cry in that repetition of her name, almost an anguish. She stole an upward glance at him, her face pale, her beautiful lips half parted, and in her depthless brown eyes, alive now with a new light which had been born within her, there was no forbiddance, though she dropped them hastily, and bent her head still lower. She had made herself an eternal part of him just then, had he but seized upon that unspoken assent, and taken her in his arms, and breathed to her of the love of man for woman, the love that never dies nor wavers nor falters, so long as the human race shall endure.

He bent still closer to her, so that he all but enfolded her. His warm breath was upon her cheek. The sympathy which was between them bridged the narrow chasm of air, and enveloped them in an ethereal flame which coursed them from head to foot, and had already nigh welded them into one.

"I need you, Gail!" he told her. "I need you to be my wife, my sweetheart, my companion. I need you to go with me through life, to walk hand in hand with me about the greatest work in the world, the re-

demption of the fallen and helpless, into whose lives we may shed some of the beauty which blossoms in our own."

There was a low cry from Gail, a cry which was half a sob, which came with a sharp intake of the breath, and carried with it pain and sorrow and protest. She had been so happy, in what she fancied to be the near fulfilment of the promptings which had grown so strong within her. No surge of emotion like this had ever swept over her; no such wave of yearning had ever carried her impetuously up and out of herself as this had done. It had been the ecstatic answer to all her dreams, the ripe and rich and perfect completion of every longing within her; yet, in the very midst of it had come a word which broke the magic thrall; a thought which had torn the fairy web like a rude storm from out the icy north; a devouring genii which, dark and frightening, advanced to destroy all the happiness which might follow this first inrushing commingling of these two perfectly correlated elements!

"I can't!" she breathed, but she did not withdraw her hand from his clasp. She could not! It was as if those two palms had welded together, and had become parts of one and the same organism.

There was an instant of silence, in which she slowly gathered her swirling senses, and in which he sat, shocked, stunned, disbelieving his own ears. Why, he had known, as positively, and more positively, than if she had told him, that there was a perfect response in her to the great desire which throbbed within him. It had come to him from her like the wavering of soft music, music which had blended with his own pulsing diapason in a melody so subtle that it drowned the senses to languorous swooning; it had come to him with

the delicate far-off pervasiveness of the birth of a new star in the heavens; it had come to him as a fragrance, as a radiance, as the beautiful tints of spring blossoms, as something infinitely stronger, and deeper, and sweeter, than the sleep of death. That tremendous and perfect fitness and accord with him he felt in her hand even now.

"I can't, Tod," she said again, and neither one noticed that she had unconsciously used the name she had heard from his mother, and which she had unconsciously linked with her thoughts of him. "There could never be a unity of purpose in us," and now, for the first time, she gently withdrew her hand. "I could never be in sympathy with your work, nor you with my views. Have you noticed that we have never held a serious dispute over any topic but one?"

He drew a chair before her, and took her hand again, but this time he patted it between his own as if it were a child's.

"Gail, dear, that is an obstacle which will melt away. There was a time when I felt as you do. The time will come when you, too, will change."

"You don't understand," she gently told him. "I believe in God the Creator; the Maker of my conscience; my Friend and my Father. I am in no doubt, no quandary, no struggle between faith and disbelief. I see my way clearly, and there are no thorns to cut for me. I shall never change."

He looked at her searchingly for a moment, and then his face grew grave; but there was no coldness in it, nor any alteration in the blueness of his eyes.

"I shall pray for you," he said, with simple faith.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PUBLIC IS AROUSED

CLAD in her filmy cream lace gown, Gail walked slowly into her boudoir, and closed the door, and sank upon her divan. She did not stop to-night to let down her hair and change to her dainty negligee, nor to punctiliously straighten the room, nor to turn on the beautiful green light; instead, with all the electric bulbs blazing, she sat with her chin in her hand, and, with her body perfectly in repose, tried to study the whirl of her mind.

She was shaken, she knew that, shaken and stirred as she had never been before. Something in the depths of her had leaped up into life, and cried out in agony, and would not stop crying until it was satisfied.

The hardest part of the whirl from which to untangle herself was the tremendous overwhelming attraction there had been between them. The red wave of consciousness rose up over her neck and crimsoned her cheeks and flushed her very brow, as the nearness of him came back to her. Again she could feel that marvellous welding of their palms, the tingle of her shoulder where he had accidentally brushed against it; the music of his voice, which had set up that ecstatic answering vibration within her. She felt again his warm breath upon her cheek, the magnetic thrill of his arms as he enfolded her, the breathless joy which had ensued when

he had drawn her to his breast, and held and held and held her there, as an indivisible part of him, forever and forever. The burning pressure of his lips upon hers! That breathless, intolerable ecstasy when he had folded her closer, and still closer! A sense of shame flooded her that she had yielded so much, that she had been so helpless in the might and the strength and the sweep —

She raised her head with a jerk, and rubbed her hands over her eyes. Why there had been no such episode! He had not folded her in his arms, nor drawn her to him, nor kissed her lips; though her breath was fluttering and her wrists burning in the bare memory of it; he had only drawn quite near to her, and held her hand; and once he had kissed it! How then had she reproduced all these sensations so vividly? Then indeed, shame came to her, as she realised how much more completely than he could know, she had, in one breathless instant, given herself to him!

It was that shame which came to her rescue, which set her upon her defence, which started her to the seeking for her justification. She had refused him, even at the very height of her most intense yielding. And why? She must go deeper into the detail of that. She had to grope her way slowly and painfully back through the quivering maze of her senses, to recall the point at which she had been taken rudely from the present into the future.

“I need you to walk hand in hand with me about the greatest work in the world!” That was it; the greatest work in the world! And what was that work? To live and teach ritual in place of religion; to turn worship into a social observance; to use helpless belief as a ladder of ambition; to reduce faith to words, and

hope to a recitation, and charity to an obligation; to make pomp and ceremony a substitute for conscience, and to interpose a secretary between the human heart and God!

For just an instant Gail's eyelids dropped, her long brown lashes curved upon her cheeks, while beneath them her eyes glinted, and a smile touched the corners of her lips; then she was serious again. No, she had decided wisely. They could not spend a lifetime in the ecstasy of touch. Between those rare moments of the rapture of love must come stern hours of waking. Then she must live a constant lie, she must battle down her own ideals and her own thoughts and her own worship and subscribe to a dead shell of pretence, which she had come to hold in contempt and even loathing. She must appear constantly before the world as subscribing to and upholding a sham which had been formulated as thoroughly as the multiplication table; and to do all these things she would be compelled to throttle her own dear Deity, with whom she had been friends since her babyhood, to whom she could go at any hour with pure faith and simple confidence; always in love and never in fear!

Yes, she had chosen wisely. Through all the years to come there would be clash upon clash, until they would grow so far apart spiritually that no human yearning, no matter how long nor how strong, could bridge the chasm. She was humiliated to be compelled to confess to herself that the tremendous fire which had consumed them, that the tremendous attraction which had drawn them together, that the tremendous ecstasy which had enveloped them, was by no means of the soul or the spirit or the mind. And yet, how potent that attraction had been, how it left her still quivering

with longing. Did she despise that tendency in herself? Something within her answered defiantly "No!" Still defiantly, she exulted in it; for many instincts which the Creator has planted in humanity have been made sinful by teaching alone. Moreover, a further search brought a deserved approbation to the rescue of her self-respect. Mighty as had been the call upon her from without and from within, she had resisted it, and driven it back, and leashed it firmly with the greater strength of her faith! She gloried that she had not been weak in this stormy test, and her eyes softened with a smile of gratitude. Poor Tod!

There was a knock on the door, and Gail smiled again as she said:

"Come in."

Mrs. Helen Davies entered, tall and stately in her boudoir frills and ruffles. She gazed searchingly at Gail's now calm face, with its delicately tinted oval cheeks and its curved red lips and its brown eyes, into which a measure of peace had come. The face did not tell her as much as she had expected to find in it, but the fact that Gail had so far deviated from her unbreakable habit of piling into a negligee and putting every minute trace of disorder to rights before she did anything else, was sufficient indication that something unusual had occurred. Aunt Helen sat down in front of Gail and prepared to enact the rôle of conscientious mother.

"Doctor Boyd proposed to you to-night," she charged, with affectionate authority.

"Yes, Aunt Helen," and Gail began to pull pins out of her hair.

A worried expression crossed the brow of Aunt Helen.

"Did you accept him?" and she fairly quivered with anxiety.

"No, Aunt Helen." Quite calmly, piling more hair-pins and still more into the little tray by her side, and shaking down her rippling waves of hair.

Aunt Helen sighed a deep sigh of relief, and smiled her approval.

"I was quite hopeful that you would not," and the tone was one of distinct pleasure. "Doctor Boyd is a most estimable young man, but I should not at all consider him a desirable match for you."

Gail walked across to her dressing table, and rang for her maid. Something within her flared up in defence of Tod, but the face which, an instant later, she turned toward the older woman, had its eyelids down and the eyes glinting through that curving fringe and the little smile at the corners of the lips.

"Of course, he is perfectly eligible," went on Aunt Helen, studying the young man in question much as if he were on the auction block, and guaranteed sound in every limb. "While there would be no possibility of gaiety, and no freedom of action for even an instant, with the eyes of every one so critically fixed on a rector's wife, still she would have the entrée into the most exclusive circles, and would have a social position of such dignified respectability as could be secured in no other way." Interested in her own analysis, and perfectly placid because, after all, Gail had refused him, she did not notice that Gail, now brushing her hair, stopped in the middle of a downward stroke, and then fell to brushing furiously. "Moreover, the young man is highly ambitious," went on Aunt Helen. "The movement for the magnificent new cathedral had lagged

for years before he came; but he had not been here twelve months before he had the entire congregation ambitious to build the most magnificent cathedral the world has ever seen. My dear child, you'll break your hair with that rough brushing! Moreover, the new rectory must, of course, be built in keeping with the cathedral, and no multi-millionaire could erect a home more palatial than Doctor Boyd will occupy."

Gail unfastened her necklace.

"However, Gail dear, you have shown a degree of carefulness which I am delighted to find in you," complimented Aunt Helen. "If you handle all your affairs so sensibly, you have a brilliant future before you."

"I must be an awful worry to you, Aunt Helen," observed Gail, and walking over, she slipped her arm around Mrs. Davies' neck, and kissed her, and looked around for her chocolate box.

Gail's maid came in, and Mrs. Davies bade her sister's niece good night most cordially, and retired with a great load off her mind; and half an hour later the lights in Gail's pretty little suite went out.

If she lay long hours looking out at the pale stars, if, in the midst of her calm logic, she suddenly buried her face in her pillows and sobbed silently, if, toward morning, she awoke with a little cry to find her face and her hands hot, all these things were but normal and natural. It is enough to know that she came to her breakfast bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked and smiling with the pleasant greetings of the day, and picked up the papers casually, and lit upon the newest sensation of the free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press!

The free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press had found Vedder Court, and had made it the sudden

focus of the public eye. Those few who were privileged to know intimately the workings of that adroit master of the public welfare, Tim Corman, could have recognised clearly his fine hand in the blaze of notoriety which obscure Vedder Court had suddenly received. After having endured the contamination and contagion of the Market Square Church tenements for so many years, the city had, all at once, discovered that the condition was unbearable! The free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press had taken up, with great enthusiasm, the work of poking the finger of scorn at Vedder Court. It had published photographs of the disreputable old sots of buildings, and, where they did not seem to drip enough, the artists had retouched them. It had sent budding young Poes and Dickensses down there to write up the place in all the horrors which a lurid fancy could portray, or a hectic mind conceive; and it had given special prominence to the masterly effort of one litterateur, who never went near the place, but, after dancing ably until three A. M., had dashed up to his lonely room, and had wrapped a wet towel around his head, and had conceived of the scene as it would look in absolute darkness, with one pale lamp gleaming on the Doréian faces of the passersby! It had sent the sob sisters there in shoals to interview the down-trodden, and, above all things, it had put prominently before the public eye the immense profit which Market Square Church wrung from this organised misery!

Gail turned sick at heart as she read. Uncle Jim permitted four morning papers to come to the house, and the dripping details, with many variations, were in all of them. She glanced over toward the rectory and the dignified old church standing beyond it, with

mingled indignation and humiliation. A sort of ignominy seemed to have descended upon it, like a man whose features seem coarsened from the instant he is doomed to wear prison stripes; and the fact which she particularly resented was that a portion of the disgrace of Market Square Church seemed to have descended upon her. She could not make out why this should be; but it was. Aunt Grace Sargent, bustling about to see that Gail was supplied with more kinds of delicacies than she could possibly sample, saw that unmistakable look of distress on Gail's face, and went straight up to her sister Helen, the creases of worry deep in her brow.

Mrs. Helen Davies was having her coffee in bed, and she continued that absorbing ceremony while she considered her sister's news.

"I did not think that Gail was so deeply affected by the occurrences of last night," she mused; "but of course she could not sleep, and she's full of sympathy this morning, and afraid that maybe she made a mistake, and feels perfectly wretched."

Grace Sargent sat right down.

"Did the rector propose?" she breathlessly inquired.

Mrs. Davies poured herself some more hot coffee, and nodded.

"She refused him."

"Oh!" and acute distress settled on Grace Sargent's brow, with such a firm clutch that it threatened to homestead the location. Mrs. Sargent shared the belief of the Reverend Smith Boyd's mother, that Smith Boyd was the finest young man in the world; and Gail's aunt was speechless with dismay and disappointment.

"I have ceased to worry about Gail's future," went on Mrs. Davies complacently. "It is her present con-

dition about which I am most concerned. She is so conscientious and self-analytical that she may distress herself over this affair, and I must get in Arly and Lucile, and plan a series of gaieties which will keep her mind occupied from morning until night."

In consequence of this kindly decision, Gail was plunged into gaiety until she loathed the scrape of a violin! The mere fact that she had no time to think did not remove the fact that she had a great deal to think about, and the gaiety only added dismally to her troubled burden.

Meanwhile, the free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press went merrily onward with its righteous Vedder Court crusade, until it had the public indignation properly aroused. The public indignation rose to such a pitch that it almost meant something. There is not the slightest doubt that, if the public had not been busy with affairs of its own, and if it had not been in the habit of leaving everything to be seen to by the people financially interested, and if it had not consisted chiefly of a few active vocal cords, there is not the slightest doubt, it is worth repeating, that the public might have done something about Vedder Court! As things were, it grew most satisfactorily indignant. It talked of nothing else, in the subways and on the "L's" and on the surface lines, and on the cindery commuter trains; and on the third day of the agitation, before something else should happen to shake the populace to the very foundation of its being, the city authorities condemned the Vedder Court property as unsanitary, inhuman, and unsafe, as a menace to the public morals, health and life, and as a blot upon civilisation; this last being a fancy touch added by Tim Corman himself, who, in his old age, had a tendency to link poetry to his

practicability. In consequence of this decision, the city authorities ordered Vedder Court to be forthwith torn down, demolished, and removed from the face of the earth; thereby justifying, after all, the existence of the free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press! The exact psychological moment had been chosen. The public, caught at the very height of its frenzy, applauded, and ate its dinner in virtuous satisfaction; and Gail Sargent's distress crystallised into a much easier thing to handle; just plain anger!

And so Market Square Church had persisted in clutching its greedy hold on a commercial advantage so vile that even a notoriously corrupt city government had ordered it destroyed! Her mind was immensely relieved about the Reverend Smith Boyd. She had chosen well, and wisely!

CHAPTER XXII

THE REV. SMITH BOYD PROTESTS

THE doves which in summer flitted about the quiet little vestry yard, and cooed over the vestry door, would have flown away had they been at home; for it was a stormy affair, with loud voices and clashing wills and a general atmosphere of tensivity, which was somewhat at variance with the red-robed figure of the Good Shepherd in the pointed window of the vestry. The late arrival was Joseph G. Clark, and his eye sought that of Banker Chisholm, before he nodded to the others and took his seat at the Gothic table. The Reverend Smith Boyd, who was particularly straight and tall to-day, and particularly in earnest, paused long enough for the slight disturbance to subside, and then he finished his speech.

"That is my unalterable position in the matter," he declared. "If Market Square Church has a mission, it is the responsibility for these miserable human wrecks whom we have made our wards."

"We can't feed and clothe them," objected Banker Chisholm, whose white mutton-chops already glowed pink from the anger-reddened skin beneath.

"It doesn't pay to pauperise the people," supplemented Willis Cunningham, stroking his sparse Vanddyke complacently. Cunningham, whose sole relationship to economics consisted in permitting his secretary

to sign checks, had imbibed a few principles which sufficed for all occasions.

"I do not wish to pauperise them," returned the rector. "I am willing to accept the shame of having the city show Market Square Church its duty, in exchange for the pleasure of replacing the foul tenements in Veder Court with clean ones."

Joseph G. Clark glanced again at Chisholm.

"They'd be dirty again in ten years," he observed. "If we build the new type of sanitary tenement we shall have to charge more rent, or not make a penny of profit; and we can't get more rent because the people who would pay it will not come into that neighbourhood."

"Are we compelled to make a profit?" retorted the rector. "Is it necessary for Market Square Church to remain perpetually a commercial landlord?"

The vestry gazed at the Reverend Smith Boyd in surprised disapproval. Their previous rector had talked like that, and the Reverend Smith Boyd had been a great relief.

"So long as the church has property at all, it will meet with that persistent charge," argued Chisholm. "It seems to me that we have had enough of it. My own inclination would be to sell the property outright, and take up slower, but less personal, forms of investment."

Old Nicholas Van Ploon, sitting far enough away to fold his hands comfortably across his tight vest, screwed his neck around so that he could glare at the banker.

"No," he objected; for the Van Ploon millions had been accumulated by the growth of tall office buildings out of a worthless Manhattan swamp. "We should never sell the property."

"There are a dozen arguments against keeping it," returned the nasal voice of old Joseph G. Clark. "The chief one is the necessity of making a large investment in these new tenements."

The Reverend Smith Boyd rose again, shutting the light from the red robe of the Good Shepherd out of quietly concentrated Jim Sargent's eyes.

"I object to this entire discussion," he stated. "We have a moral obligation which forbids us to discuss matters of investment and profit within these walls as if we were a lard trust. We have neglected our moral obligation in Vedder Court, until we are as blackened with sin as the thief on the cross."

Shrewd old Rufus Manning looked at the young rector curiously. He was puzzled over the change in him.

"Don't swing the pendulum too far, Doctor Boyd," Manning reminded him, with a great deal of kindness. These two had met often in Vedder Court. "Our sins, such as they are, are more passive than active."

It was, of course, old Nicholas Van Ploon who fell back again on the stock argument which had been quite sufficient to soothe his conscience for all these years.

"We give these people cheaper rent than they can find anywhere in the city."

"We should continue to do so, but in cleaner and more wholesome quarters," quickly returned the rector. "This is the home of all these poverty stricken people whom Market Square Church has taken under its shelter, and we have no right to dispose of it."

"That's what I say," and Nicholas Van Ploon nodded his round head. "We should not sell the property."

"We can not for shame, if for nothing else," agreed the rector, seizing on every point of advantage to sup-

port his intense desire to lift the Vedder Court derelicts from the depth of their degradation. "We lie now under the disgrace of having owned property so filthy that the city was compelled to order it torn down. The only way in which we can redeem the reputation of Market Square Church is to replace those tenements with better ones, and conduct them as a benefit to the people rather than to our own pockets."

"That's a clever way of putting it," commended Jim Sargent. "It's time we did something to get rid of our disgrace," and he was most earnest about it. He had been the most uncomfortable of all these vestrymen in the past few days; for the disgrace of Market Square Church had been a very reliable topic of conversation in Gail Sargent's neighbourhood.

The nasal voice of smooth-shaven old Joseph G. Clark drawled into the little silence which ensued.

"What about the Cathedral?" he asked, and the hush which followed was far deeper than the one which he had broken. Even the Reverend Smith Boyd was driven to some fairly profound thought. His bedroom and his study were lined with sketches of the stupendously beautiful cathedral, the most expensive in the world, in which he was to disseminate the gospel.

"Suppose we come back to earth," resumed Clark, who had built the Standard Cereal Company into a monopoly of all the breadstuffs by that process. "If we rebuild we set ourselves back in the cathedral project ten years. You can't wipe out what you call our disgrace, even if you give all these paupers free board and compulsory baths. My proposition is to telephone for Edward E. Allison, and tell him we're ready to accept his offer."

"Not while I'm a member of this vestry," declared

Nicholas Van Ploon, swivelling himself to defy Joseph G. Clark. "We don't sell the property."

"I put Mr. Clark's proposition as a motion," jerked W. T. Chisholm, and in the heated argument which ensued, the Good Shepherd in the window, taking advantage of the shifting sun, removed from the room the light of the red robe.

In the end, the practical minded members won over the sentimentalists, if Nicholas Van Ploon could be classed under that heading, and Allison was telephoned. Before they were through wrangling over the decision to have him meet them, Allison was among them. One might almost have thought that he had been waiting for the call; but he exchanged no more friendly glances with Clark and Chisholm, of the new International Transportation Company, than he did with any of the others.

"Well, Allison, we've about decided to accept your offer for the Vedder Court property," stated Manning.

"I haven't made you any, but I'm willing," returned Allison.

Jim Sargent drew from his pocket a memorandum slip.

"You offered us a sum which, at three and a half per cent., would accrue, in ten years, to forty-two million dollars," he reminded the president of the Municipal Transportation Company. "That figures to a spot-cash proposition of thirty-one millions, with a repeating decimal of one; so somebody will have to lose a cent."

"That offer is withdrawn," said Allison.

"I don't see why," objected Jim Sargent. "The property is as valuable for your purpose as it ever was."

"I don't dispute that; but in that offer I allowed you

for the income earning capacity of your improved property. Since that capacity is stopped, I don't feel obliged to pay you for it, or, in other words, to make up to you the loss which the city has compelled you to sustain."

"There is some show of reason in what Allison says," observed Joseph G. Clark.

Chisholm leaned forward, with his elbows on the table, around the edge of which were carved the heads of winged cherubs.

"What is your present offer?"

"Twenty-five million; cash."

"We refuse!" announced Nicholas Van Ploon, bobbing his round head emphatically.

"I'm not so sure that we do," returned Clark. "I have been studying property values in that neighbourhood, and I doubt if we can obtain more."

"Then we don't sell!" insisted Nicholas Van Ploon.

"I scarcely think we wish to take up this discussion with Mr. Allison until we have digested the offer," observed the quiet voice of Manning, and, on this hint, Allison withdrew.

He smiled as he heard the voices which broke out in controversy the moment he had closed the door behind him. Being so near, he naturally called on Gail Sargent, and found her entertaining a little tea party of the gayest and brightest whom Aunt Helen Davies could bring together.

She came into the little reception "cosy" to meet Allison, smiling with pleasure. There seemed to be a degree of wistfulness in her greeting of her friends since the night of her return.

"Of course I couldn't overlook an opportunity to drop in," said Allison, shaking her by both hands, and

holding them while he surveyed her critically. There was a tremendous comfort in his strength.

"So you only called because you were in the neighbourhood," bantered Gail.

"Guilty," he laughed. "I've just been paying attention to my religious duties."

"I wasn't aware that you knew you had any," returned Gail, sitting in the shadow of the window jamb. Allison's eyes were too searching.

"I attend a vestry meeting now and then," he replied, and then he laughed shortly. "I'd rather do business with forty corporations than with one vestry. A church always expects to conduct its share of the negotiations on a strictly commercial basis, while it expects you to mingle a little charity with your end of the transactions."

"The Vedder Court property," she guessed, with a slight contraction of her brows.

"Still after it," said Allison, and talked of other matters.

Jim Sargent returned, and glancing into the little reception tête-à-tête as he passed, saw Allison and came back.

"I didn't expect to see you so soon," wondered Allison.

"We broke up in a row," laughed Jim Sargent. "Clark and Chisholm were willing to accept your price, but the rest of us listened to Doctor Boyd and Nicholas Van Ploon, and fell. We insist on our cathedral, and Doctor Boyd's plan seems the best way to get it, though even that may necessitate a four or five years' delay."

"What's his plan?" asked Allison.

"Rebuilding," returned Sargent. "We can put up tenements good enough to pass the building inspec-

tors and to last fifteen years. With the same rents we are now receiving, we can offer them better quarters, and, as Doctor Boyd suggested, redeem ourselves from some of the disgrace of this whole proceeding. Clever, sensible idea, I think."

Gail was leaning forward, with her fingers clasped around her knee; her brown eyes had widened, and a little red spot had appeared in either cheek; her red lips were half parted, as she looked up in wonder at her Uncle Jim.

"Is that the plan upon which they have decided?" and Allison looked at his watch.

"Well, hardly," frowned Sargent. "We couldn't swing Clark and Chisholm. At the last minute they suggested that we might build lofts, and the impending fracas seemed too serious to take up just now, so we've tabled the whole thing."

Allison smiled, and slipped his watch back in his pocket.

"It's fairly definite, however, that you won't sell," he concluded.

"Not at your figure," laughed Sargent. "If we took your money, Doctor Boyd would be too old to preach in the new cathedral."

"He'll pull it through some way," declared Allison. "He's as smart as a whip."

Neither gentleman had noticed Gail. She had settled back in her chair during these last speeches, weary and listless, and overcome with a sense of some humiliation too evasive to be properly framed even in thought. She had a sense that she had given away something vastly precious, and which would never be valued. Neither did they notice that she changed suddenly to relief. She had been justified in her decision.

She took the reins of conversation herself after Uncle Jim had left, and entertained Allison so brightly that he left with impatience at the tea party which monopolised her.

Later, when the Reverend Smith Boyd dropped in, he met with a surprising and disconcerting vivacity. In his eyes there was pain and suffering, and inexpressible hunger, but in hers there was only dancing frivolity; a little too ebullient, perhaps, if he had been wise enough to know; but he was not.

CHAPTER XXIII

A SERIES OF GAITIES

GAIETY consists in rising in the morning so tired that it takes three hours of earnest work with a maid, a masseuse, a physical directress, a hairdresser, and a bonnetiere, before one can produce a spontaneous silvery laugh, which is never required, expected or considered good form before two P. M. Gail Sargent went in for gaiety, and, moreover, she enjoyed it. She rode, she drove, she went calling and received, she attended teas and gave them, she dined out and entertained, in the name of her eager Aunt Grace, she went to theatres, the opera, concerts, and the lively midnight cafés, which had all gone nervously insane with freak dancing, she attended balls, house parties, and all the in-between diversions which her novelty-seeking friends could discover or invent, and she flirted outrageously! She used her eyes, and the pretty pout of her red lips, and the toss of her head, and all the wiles of coquetry, to turn men into asses, and she enjoyed that, too! It was a part of her feminine birthright to enter with zest into this diversion, and it was only envy which criticised her. Aunt Helen Davies, who knew her world by chapter and verse, stood behind the scenes of all this active vaudeville, and applauded. It was at the opera that Aunt Helen could no longer conceal her marvel.

“My dear,” she said, under cover of the throbbing

music of Thais, "I have never seen anything like you!"

"I don't quite know whether to take that as a compliment or not," laughed Gail, who had even, in her new stage of existence, learned to pay no attention to music.

"The remark was not only intended to be complimentary, but positively gushing," replied Aunt Helen, returning with a smile the glance of their hostess, the stiff Miss Van Ploon. "After two weeks of the gayest season I have ever witnessed, you are as fresh and vivacious as when you started."

"It's a return to first principles," stated Gail, considering the matter seriously. "I've discovered the secret of success in New York, either commercial or social. It is to have an unbreakable constitution."

The dapper little marquis, who was laying a very well conducted siege for the heart and hand of Miss Van Ploon, leaned over Gail's velvet shoulder and whispered something in her ear. Gail leaned back a trifle to answer him, her deep brown eyes flashing up at him, her red lips adorably curved, that delicate colour wavering in her cheeks; and Mrs. Davies, disregarding entirely the practised luring of the dapper little marquis, who was as harmless as a canary bird, viewed Gail with admiration.

Houston Van Ploon, surveying Gail with pride, made up his mind about a problem which he had been seriously considering. Gail Sargent, taken point by point, appearance, charm, manner, disposition and health, had the highest percentage of perfection of any young woman he had ever met, an opinion in which his father and sister had agreed, after several solemn family discussions.

Nicholas Van Ploon leaned over to his daughter.

"She has dimples," he catalogued, nodding his round

head in satisfaction and clasping his hands comfortably over his broad white evening waistcoat.

Dick Rodley irrupted into the box with Lucile and Arly, just as Thais started for the convent, and they were only the forerunners of a constant stream which, during the intermission, came over to laugh with Gail, and to look into her sparkling eyes, and exchange repartee with her, and enjoy that beauty which was like a fragrance.

Who was the most delighted person in the Van Ploon box? Aunt Helen Davies! She checked off the eligibles, counting them, estimating them, judging the exact degree in which Gail had interested them, and the exact further degree Gail might interest them if she chose.

Gail, standing, was a revelation to-night, not alone to Nicholas Van Ploon, who nearly dislocated his neck in turning to feast his gaze on her in numb wonder, but to Aunt Helen herself. Gail wore an Egyptian costume, an absurdly straight thing fashioned like a cylinder, but which, in some mysterious and alluring way, suggested the long, slender, gracefully curving lines which it concealed. The foundation colour was tarnished gold, on which were beaded panels in dark blue stones, touched here and there with dull red. Encircling her small head was an Egyptian tiara, studded in the front with lapis lazuli and deep red corals, with one great fire opal glowing in the centre; and her shining brown hair was waved well below the ears, and smoothly caught under around the back of her perfect neck. On her cheeks and on her lips were the beautiful natural tints which were the envy and despair of every pair of lorgnette shielded eyes, but on her eyelashes, as part of her costume, Gail had daringly lined

a touch of that intense black which is ground in the harems of the old Nile.

"You're the throb of the evening, sweetheart," Dick Rodley laughed down at her, as they stood at the door of the box with the function passing in and out.

"Thank you, Dicky dear," she responded, smiling up at him. Since her earnest gaieties had begun, Dick had been her most frequent companion. He was one of the component members of that zestful little set composed of Gail, Lucile and Arly, and the bubbling little Mrs. Babbitt, the cherub-checked Marion Kenneth, the entirely sophisticated Gwen Halstead, and whatever nice men happened to be available. Dick and Ted and Gerald were, of course, always available.

"I'm disappointed," complained Dick. "You don't blush any more when I am affectionate with you."

"One loses the trick here," she laughed. "The demands are too frequent."

He bent a little closer to her.

"I'm going to propose to you again to-night," he told her.

"You're so satisfactory," she returned carelessly. "But really, Dicky, I don't see how you're going to manage it, unless you perform it right here, and that's so conventional."

"Play hookey," he mischievously advised. "I'll tell you what we'll do. You shoo Houston out of the house the minute you get in; then Lucile and Ted and Arly and Gerald and I will sail up and carry you off to supper, after which I'll take you home and propose."

Gail's eyes snapped with the activity of that disloyal programme, and the little silvery laugh, for which she had been so noted, welled up from her throat.

"You have to wait around the corner until he goes away," she insisted.

"I'll bring a guitar if you like," Dick promised, with so much avidity that she feared, for an instant, that he might do it.

"You're monopolising me scandalously," she protested. "Go away," and she turned immediately to the dapper little marquis, who was enduring the most difficult evening of his life. Gail was so thoroughly adapted to a grand affair, one in which he could avow universes; and the Miss Van Ploon was so exacting.

The study door was open when Houston Van Ploon sedately escorted Mrs. Davies and Gail into the library, one of those rooms which appoint themselves the instinctive lounging places of all family intimates. Gail turned up her big eyes in sparkling acknowledgment as the punctilious Van Ploon took her cloak, and, at that moment, as she stood gracefully poised, she caught the gaze of the Reverend Smith Boyd fixed on her with such infinite longing that it distressed her. She did not want him to suffer.

Uncle Jim strode out with a hearty greeting, and, at the sound of the voices of no one but Gail and Mrs. Davies and Houston Van Ploon, old "Daddy" Manning appeared in the doorway, followed by the rector.

"The sweetest flower that blows in any dale," quoted "Daddy" Manning, patting Gail's hand affectionately.

The rector stood by, waiting to greet her, after Manning had monopolised her a selfish moment, and the newly aroused eye of colour in him seized upon the gold and blue and red of her straight Egyptian costume, and recognised in them a part of her endless variety. The black on her lashes. He was close enough

to see that; and he marvelled at himself that he could not disapprove.

Gail was most uncomfortably aware of him in this nearness; but she turned to him with a frank smile of friendship.

"This looks like a conspiracy," she commented, glancing towards the study, which was thick with smoke.

"It's an offensively innocent one," returned Manning, giving the rector but small chance. "We're discussing the plans for the new Vedder Court tenements."

"Oh!" observed Gail, and radiated a distinct chill, whereupon the Reverend Smith Boyd, divesting himself of some courteous compliment, exchanged inane adieus with Mrs. Davies and young Van Ploon, and took his committee back into the study.

Mrs. Davies remained but a moment or so. She even seemed eager to retire, and as she left the library, she cast a hopeful backward glance at the dancing-eyed Gail and the correct young Van Ploon, who, with his Dutch complexion and his blonde English moustache and his stalwart American body, to say nothing of his being a Van Ploon, represented to her the ideal of masculine perfection. He was an eligible who never did anything a second too early or a second too late, or deviated by one syllable from the exact things he should say.

If the anxious Aunt Helen had counted on any important results from this evening's opportunities, she had not taken into her calculations the adroitness of Gail. In precisely five minutes Van Ploon was on the doorstep, with his Inverness on his shoulders and his silk hat in his hand, without even having approached the elaborate introduction to certain important remarks

he had definitely decided to make. Gail might not have been able to rid herself of him so easily, for he was a person of considerable momentum, but he had rather planned to make a more deliberate ceremony of the matter, impulsive opportunities not being in his line of thought.

A tall young man in an Inverness walked rapidly past the door while Van Ploon was saying the correctly clever things in the way of adieu; and shortly after she had closed the door on Van Ploon, a pebble struck the side window of the library. Gail opened the window and looked out. Dick Rodley stood just below, with his impossibly handsome face upturned to the light, his black eyes shining with glee, his Inverness tossed romantically back over one shoulder, and an imaginary guitar in his hands. Up into the library floated the familiar opening strains of Tosti's Serenade, and the Reverend Smith Boyd glanced out through the study door at the enticing figure of Gail, and knitted his brows in a frown.

"You absurd thing," laughed Gail to the serenader. "No, you daren't come in," and she vigorously closed the window. Laughing to herself, she bustled into her wraps.

"Here, where are you going?" called her Uncle Jim.

"Hush!" she admonished him, peering, for a glowing moment, in the study door, a vision of such disturbing loveliness that the Reverend Smith Boyd, for the balance of the evening, saw, staring up at him from the Vedder Court tenement sketches, nothing but eyes and lips and waving brown hair, and delicately ovalled cheeks, their colour heightened by the rolling white fur collar. "None of you must say a word about this,"

she gaily went on. "It's an escapade!" and she was gone.

Uncle Jim, laughing, but nevertheless intent upon his responsibilities, grabbed her as she opened the front door, but on the step he saw Dick Rodley, and, in the machine drawing up at the curb, Arly and Gerald and Lucile and Ted, so he kissed Gail good night, and passed her over to the jovial Dick, and returned to the study to brag about her.

Gaiety reigned supreme once more! Lights and music and dancing, the hum of chatter and laughter, the bustle and confusion of the place, the hilarity which brings a new glow to the cheek and sparkle to the eye, and then home again in the crisp wintry air, and Dick following into the house with carefree assurance.

"Gracious, Dicky, you can't come in!" protested Gail, with half frowning, half laughing remonstrance. "It's a fearful hour for calls."

"I'm a friend of the family," insisted Dick, calmly closing the door behind them and hanging his hat on the rack. He took Gail's cloak and threw off his Inverness. "I guess you've forgotten the programme."

"Oh, yes, the proposal," remembered Gail. "Well, have it over with."

"All right," he agreed, and taking her arm and tucking her shoulder comfortably close to him, he walked easily with her back to the library. Arrived there, he seated her on her favourite chair, and drew up another one squarely in front of her.

"I'm going to shock you to death," he told her. "I'm going to propose seriously to you."

Some laughing retort was on her lips, but she caught a look in his eyes which suddenly stopped her.

"I am very much in earnest about it, Gail," and his

voice bore the stamp of deep sincerity. "I love you. I want you to be my wife."

"Dick," protested Gail, and it was she who reached out and placed her hand in his. The action was too confidently frank for him to mistake it.

"I was afraid you'd think that way about it," he said, his voice full of a pain of which they neither one had believed him capable. "This is the first time I ever proposed, except in fun, and I want to make you take me seriously. Gail, I've said so many pretty things to you, that now, when I am in such desperate earnest, there's nothing left but just to try to tell you how much I love you; how much I want you!" He stopped, and, holding her hand, patting it gently with unconscious tenderness, he gazed earnestly into her eyes. His own were entirely without that burning glow which he had, for so long, bestowed on all the young and beautiful. They were almost sombre now, and in their depth was an humble wistfulness which made Gail's heart flow out to him.

"I can't, Dick," she told him, smiling affectionately at him. "You're the dearest boy in the world, and I want you for my friend as long as we live; for my very dear friend!"

He studied her in silence for a moment, and then he put his hands on her cheeks, and drew her gently towards him. Still smiling into his eyes, she held up her lips, and he kissed her.

"I'd like to say something jolly before I go," he said as he rose; "but I can't seem to think of it."

Gail laughed, but there was a trace of moisture in her eyes as she took his arm.

"I'd like to help you out, Dicky, but I can't think of it either," she returned.

She was crying a little when she went up the stairs, and her mood was not even interrupted by the fact that Aunt Helen's door was ajar, and that Aunt Helen stood just behind the crack.

"Why, child, that Egyptian black is running," was Aunt Helen's first observation.

Gail dabbed hastily at the two tiny rivulets which had hesitated at the curve of her pink cheeks, and then she put her head on Aunt Helen's shoulder, and wept softly.

"Poor Dicky," she explained, and then turning, disappeared into her own room.

Mrs. Helen Davies looked after her speculatively for a moment; but she decided not to follow.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAKER OF MAPS

THERE began to be strange new stirrings in the world. Money! From the land which was its home and place of abode it leaned over cross the wide seas, and made potent whisperings in the ears of the countries where money is despised and held vulgar. They all listened. The particular potency lay in the fact that the money was so big, which took away tremendously from its despicableness and its vulgarity.

A black-bearded Grand Duke from the wide land of the frozen seas humbled himself to plain Ivan Strolesky at the sound of that whisper, and hurried westward. A high dignitary of an empire upon which the sun never sets, hid his title under a plebeian *nom de plume*, and stalked stolidly away westward to that whisper of despised American money. From the land of fashion, from the land of toys, from the land of art and music, from the land of cherry blossoms, from the land of the drowsing drug, from the land of the flashing jewels, from the lands of the burning sands and the lands of the midnight sun, there came the highest of power; and they all, light and swarth, and bearded and smooth, and large and small, and robed and trousered, centred toward the city of strong men, and, one by one, presented themselves, in turn, to a grave and silent kinky-haired old darky by the name of Ephraim.

One motive alone had dragged them over sterile

plains and snowy mountains and bounding seas; the magic whisper of Money!

Through Ephraim they came to the stocky, square-standing, square-faced chess player who was called Allison. They found him pleasant, agreeable, but hardly of their class. He was so forceful as to be necessarily more or less crude, and he had an unpleasant fashion of waving aside all the decent little pretences about money. That was the fault of this whole rude country, where luxury had been brought to the greatest refinement ever known in the history of the world; it was so devoted to money, and the cultured gentlemen did their best to get all they could.

To Ivan Strolesky Allison was frank and friendly, for there was something in the big Russian which was different from these others, so he hastened to have business out of the way.

"Here are your lines," he said, spreading down a map which had been brought up-to-date by hand. "The ones I want are checked in blue. The others I do not care for."

The Grand Duke looked them over with a keen eye.

"I am rather disappointed," he confessed in excellent English. "I had understood that you wished to control our entire railway system."

"I do," assented Allison; "but I don't wish to pay out money for them all. If I can acquire the lines I have marked, the others will be controlled quite easily from the fact that I shall have the only outlet."

The Grand Duke, who had played poker in America and fan-tan in China and roulette in Monte Carlo, and all the other games throughout the world, smiled with his impressive big eyes, and put his hand up under his beard.

"The matter then seems to resolve itself into a question of price," he commented.

"No; protection," responded Allison. "If I were buying these railroads outright, I should expect my property interests to be guarded, even if I had to appeal to international equity; but I am not."

"No," admitted the Grand Duke. "They can not be purchased."

"The proposition resolves itself then into a matter of virtual commercial seizure," Allison pointed out.

The Grand Duke, still with his hand in his beard, chuckled, as he regarded Allison amusedly.

"I shall not mind if you call it piracy," he observed. "We, in Russia, must collect our revenues as we can, and we are nearly as frank as Americans about it. Returning to your matter of protection. I shall admit that the only agreement upon which we can secure what you want, would not hold in international equity; and, in consequence, the only protection I can give you is my personal word that you will not be molested in anything which you wish to do, providing it is pleasant to myself and those I represent."

"Then we'll make it an annual payment," decided Allison, putting away some figures he had prepared. "We'll make it a sliding scale, increasing each year with the earnings."

The Grand Duke considered that proposition gravely, and offered an amendment.

"After the first year," he said. "We shall begin with a large bonus, however."

Allison again put out of his mind certain figures he had prepared to suggest. Apparently the Grand Duke needed a large supply of immediate cash, and the annual payments thereafter would need to be decreased ac-

cordingly, with still another percentage deducted for profit on the Duke's necessities.

"Let us first discuss the bonus," proposed Allison, and quite amicably they went into the arrangement, whereby Ivan Strolesky filched the only valuable railroad lines in his country from the control of its present graft-ridden possessors, and handed it over to the International Transportation Company.

"By the way," said Allison. "How soon can we obtain possession?"

Ivan Strolesky put his hand in his beard again, and reflected.

"There is only one man who stands in the way," he calculated. "He will be removed immediately upon my return."

There was something so uncanny about this that even the practical and the direct Allison was shocked for an instant, and then he laughed.

"We have still much to learn from your country," he courteously confessed.

When Ivan Strolesky had gone, Allison went to his globe and drew a bright red line across the land of the frozen seas.

There came a famous diplomat, a heavy blonde man with a red face and big spectacles and a high, wide, round forehead.

"I do not know what you want," said the visitor, regarding Allison with a stolid stare. "I have come to see.

"I merely wish to chat international politics," returned Allison. "There is an old-time feud between you and your neighbours to the west."

"That is history," replied the visitor noncommittally. "We are now at peace."

"Never peace," denied Allison. "There will never be friendship between phlegmatism and mercurialism. You might rest for centuries with your neighbours to the west, but rest is not peace."

"Excuse me, but what do you mean?" and the visitor stared stolidly.

"In your affairs of mutual relationship with the land to the west, there are not less than a dozen causes upon which war could be started without difficulty," went on Allison. "In fact, you require perpetual diplomacy to prevent war with that country."

The visitor locked his thick fingers quietly together and kept on stolidly staring.

"I hear what you say," he admitted.

"You are about to have a war," Allison advised him.

"I do not believe so," and the visitor ponderously shook his head.

"I am sorry to correct you, but you yourself will bring it about. You will make, within a month, an unfortunate error of diplomatic judgment, and your old strip of disputed territory will be alive with soldiers immediately."

"No, it is not true," and the visitor went so far, in his emphasis, as to unlock his fingers and rest one hand on the back of the other.

"I think I am a very fair prophet," said Allison easily. "I have made money by my prophecy. I have more money at my command at the present time than any man in the world, than any government; wealth beyond handling in mere currency. It can only be conveyed by means of checks. Let me show you how easy it is to write them," and drawing a blank book to him, he wrote a check, and signed his name, and filled out the

stub, and tore it out, and handed it to the visitor for inspection. The visitor was properly pleased with Allison's ease in penmanship.

"I see," was the comment, and the check was handed back. He drew his straight-crowned derby towards him.

"I have made a mistake," said Allison. "I have left off a cipher," and correcting this omission with a new check, he tore up the first one.

"I see," commented the visitor, and put the second check in his pocket.

That had required considerable outlay, but when Allison was alone, he went over to his globe and made another long red mark.

A neat waisted man, with a goatee of carefully selected hairs and a luxuriant black moustache, called on Allison, and laid down his hat and his stick and his gloves, in a neat little pile, with separate jerks. He jerked out a cigarette, he jerked out a match, and jerkily lit the former with the latter.

"I am here," he said.

"I am able to give you some important diplomatic news," Allison advised him. "Your country is about to have a war with your ancient enemy to the east. It will be declared within a month."

"It will be finished in a week," prophesied the neat-waisted caller, his active eyes lighting with pleasure.

"Possibly," admitted Allison. "I understand that your country is not in the best of financial conditions to undertake a war, particularly with that ancient enemy."

"The banking system of my country is patriotic," returned the caller. "Its only important banks are controlled under one system. I am the head of that

system. I am a patriot!" and he tapped himself upon the breast with deep and sincere feeling.

"How much revenue does your position yield you personally?"

A shade of sadness crossed the brow of the neat waisted caller.

"It does not yield you this much," and Allison pushed toward him a little slip of paper on which were inscribed some figures.

The caller's eyes widened as they read the sum. He smiled. He shrugged his shoulders. He pushed back the slip of paper.

"It is droll," he laughed, and his laugh was nervous. He drew the slip of paper towards him again with a jerky little motion, then pushed it back once more.

"If your banking system found it impossible to be patriotic, your government would be compelled to raise money through other means. It would not withdraw from the war."

"Never!" and the neat-waisted caller once more touched himself on the breast.

"It would be compelled to negotiate a loan. If other governments, through some understanding among their bankers, found it difficult to provide this loan, your government would find it necessary to release its ownership, or at least its control, of its most valuable commercial possession."

The caller, who had followed Allison's progressive statement with interest, gave a quick little nod of his head.

"That most valuable commercial possession," went on Allison, "is the state railways. You were convinced by my agent that there is a new and powerful force in the world, or you would not be here. Suppose I point

out that it is possible to so cramp your banking system that you could not help your country, if you would; suppose I show you that, in the end, your ancient enemy will lose its identity, while your country remains intact; suppose I show you that the course I have proposed is the only way open which will save your country from annihilation? What then?"

The neat waisted caller, with the first slow motion he had used since he came into the room, drew the slip of paper towards him again.

There followed another banker, a ruddy-faced man whose heavy features were utterly incapable of emotion; and he sat at Allison's table in thick-jowled solidity.

"There are about to begin international movements of the utmost importance," Allison told him. "There is a war scheduled for next month, which is likely to embroil the whole of Europe."

The banking gentleman nodded his head almost imperceptibly.

"Mr. Chisholm advised me that your sources of information are authentic," he stated. "What you tell me is most deplorable."

"Quite," agreed Allison. "I am informed that the company you represent and manage has the practical direction of the entire banking system of Europe, with the exception of one country. Besides this, you have powerful interests, amounting very nearly to a monopoly, in Egypt, in India, in Australia, and in a dozen other quarters of the globe."

"You seem to be accurately informed," admitted the banking gentleman, studying interestedly the glowing coals in Allison's fireplace.

"If I can show you how a certain attitude towards

the international complications which are about to ensue will be of immense advantage to your banking system, as well as to the interests I represent, I have no doubt that we can come to a very definite understanding."

The solidly jowled banking gentleman studied the glowing coals for two minutes.

"I should be interested in learning the exact details," he finally suggested.

Allison drew some sheets of paper from an indexed file, and spread them before the financier. It was largely a matter of credits in the beginning, extensions here, curtailments there, and all on a scale so gigantic that both gentlemen went over every item with the imaginative minds of poets. In every line there was a vista of vast empires, of toppling thrones, of altered boundaries, of such an endless and shifting panorama of governmental forces, that the minds of men less inured to the contemplation of commercial and political revolutions might have grown fagged. On the third page, the solid banking gentleman, who had not made a nervous motion since his grandfather was a boy, looked up with a start.

"Why, this affects my own country!" he exclaimed. "It affects our enormous shipping interests, our great transportation lines, our commercial ramifications in all parts of the globe! It cripples us on the land and wipes us from the sea! It even affects my own government!"

"Quite true," admitted Allison. "However, I beg you to take notice that, with the international complications now about to set in, your government has reached its logical moment of disintegration. Your colonies and dependencies are only waiting for your

startlingly shrunken naval and land forces to be embroiled in the first war which will concentrate your fighting strength in one spot. When that occurs, you will have revolutions on your hands in a dozen quarters of the globe, so scattered that you can not possibly reach them. India will go first, for she thirsts for more than independence. She wants blood. Your other colonies will follow, and your great shipping interests, your transportation lines, your commercial ramifications in all parts of the globe, will be crushed and crumbled, for the foundation upon which they rest has long ago fallen into decay. Your country! Your country is already on the way to be crippled on the land and swept from the sea! I know the forces which are at work; the mightiest forces which have ever dawned on the world; the forces of twentieth century organised commerce!"

The banking gentleman drew a long breath.

"What you predict may not come to pass," he maintained, although the secret information which had brought him to Allison had prepared him to take every statement seriously.

"I can show you proofs! The war which is to be started next month is only the keystone of the political arch of the entire eastern hemisphere. There are a dozen wars, each bigger than the other, slated to follow, if needed, like the pressing of a row of electric buttons. Knowing these things as you shall, it is only a question of whether you will be with me on the crest, or in the hollow."

The caller moistened his lips, and turned his gaze finally from the glowing coals to Allison's face.

"Show me everything you know," he demanded.

They sat together until morning, and they traversed

the world; and, when that visitor had gone, Allison gave his globe a contemptuous whirl.

The balance of them were but matters of detail. With a certain prideful arrogance, of which he himself was aware, he reflected that now he could almost leave these minor powers and potentates and dignitaries to a secretary, but nevertheless he saw them all. One by one they betrayed their countrymen, their governments, their ideals and their consciences, and all for the commodity to which Allison had but to add another cypher when it was not enough! It was not that there were none but traitors in the world, but that Allison's agents had selected the proper men. Moreover, Allison was able to show them a sceptre of resistless might; the combined money, and power, and control, and wide-reaching arms of the seven greatest monopolies the world had ever known! There was no strength of resistance in any man after he had been brought, face to face, with this new giant.

It was in the grey of one morning, when Allison was through with his last enforced collaborator, and, walking over to his globe, he twirled it slowly. It was lined and streaked and crossed, over all its surface now, with red, and it was the following of this intricate web which brought back to him the triumph of his achievement. He had harnessed the world, and now he had but to drive it. That was the next step, and he clenched his fist to feel the sheer physical strength of his muscles, as if it were with this very hand that he would do the driving.

Intoxicated with a sense of his own power, he went back into his study, and drew from a drawer the photograph of a young and beautiful girl, who seemed to look up at him, out of an oval face wreathed with wav-

ing brown hair, and set with beautifully curved lips which twitched at the corners in a half sarcastic smile, from two brown eyes, deep and glowing and fraught with an intense attractiveness. Every morning he had looked at this photograph, the priceless crown of his achievement, the glittering jewel to set in the head of his sceptre, the beautiful medallion of his valour!

“Only a little longer, Gail,” he told her with a smile, and then he saluted the photograph. “Gail, the maker of maps!” he said.

CHAPTER XXV

A QUESTION OF EUGENICS

CALLERS for Mrs. Helen Davies, and a huge bouquet of American beauties for Gail. The latter young lady was in the music room, engaged with Chopin and a great deal of pensiveness, when the interruption occurred, and not quite understanding the specific division of ceremonies, crossed up into the Louis XIV room, where Nicholas Van Ploon and Miss Van Ploon sat with unusual impressiveness.

"We don't wish to see any frivolous young people," said Miss Van Ploon playfully, kissing Gail and pinching her cheek affectionately.

"You can't mean me," laughed Gail, turning to receive the outstretched palm of Nicholas, who, to her intense surprise, bent his round head and kissed her hand.

"Just you," returned Miss Van Ploon, drawing Gail down beside her. "We consider you the most delightfully frivolous young person in existence."

"That's flattering, but is it complimentary?" queried Gail, and she was astounded that Nicholas Van Ploon laughed so heartily. He had folded his hands over his entirely uncreased vest, and now he nodded at her over and over.

"Clever," he said, "very clever;" and he continued to beam on her.

Miss Van Ploon turned sidewise, to inspect Gail with a fondly critical estimate. The pensiveness which had needed Chopin for its expression, and which had been rather growing since the night of Dick Rodley's final proposal, had begun to set its slightly etherealising mark upon her.

"You are a trifle pale, my dear," said Miss Van Ploon anxiously. "We must not allow the roses to fade from those beautiful cheeks," and Nicholas Van Ploon was at once seriously concerned. He straightened his neck, and bore the exact expression of a careful head of the family about to send for a doctor.

"That's the second scolding I've had about it to-day," smiled Gail, a feeling of discomfort beginning to tighten itself around her. "Aunt Grace is worrying herself very much because I do not sleep sufficiently, but Aunt Helen tells her that the season will soon be over."

"It has been very gay," observed Miss Van Ploon approvingly. "However, I would like to see you finish the season as gloriously as you began it."

"You should systematise," advised Nicholas Van Ploon earnestly, and in an almost fatherly tone. "No matter what occurs, you should take a half hour nap before dinner every day."

Mrs. Davies came into the room, arrayed in the black velvet afternoon gown which gave her more stateliness and more impressive dignity than anything in her wardrobe. Miss Van Ploon, who was a true member of the family, in that she considered the Van Ploon entity before any individual, quite approved of Mrs. Davies, and was in nowise jealous of being so distinctly outshone in personal appearance. Nicholas Van Ploon also surveyed Mrs. Davies with a calculating eye, and bobbed

his round head slightly to himself. He had canvassed Mrs. Helen Davies before, and had discussed her in family council, but this was a final view, a dress parade, as it were.

"I suppose I am dismissed," laughed Gail, rising, in relief, as Mrs. Davies exchanged the greetings of the season with her callers.

"Yes, run away and amuse yourself, child," and Miss Van Ploon, again with that assumption that Gail was a pinafored miss with a braid down her back and a taffy stick in one hand, shook at her a playful finger; whereupon Gail, pretending to laugh as a pinafored miss should, escaped, leaving them to their guild matters, or whatever it was.

"What a charming young woman she is!" commented Miss Van Ploon, glancing, with dawning pride, at the doorway through which Gail had disappeared.

"Indeed, yes," agreed Mrs. Davies, with a certain trace of proprietorship of her own. "It has been very delightful to chaperon her."

"It must have been," acquiesced Miss Van Ploon; "and an extremely responsible task, too."

"Quite," assented Mrs. Davies. Both ladies were silent for a moment. Nicholas Van Ploon, watching them in equal silence, began to show traces of impatience.

"We shall miss Gail very much if she should return to her home at the end of the season," ventured Miss Von Ploon, and waited.

"We dread to think of losing her," admitted Mrs. Davies, beginning to feel fluttery. The question had been asked, the information given.

Miss Van Ploon turned to her father, and bowed with

formal deliberation. Nicholas Van Ploon looked at her inquiringly. He had not detected any particular meaning in the conversation, but that bow was a letter of instructions. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and touched his lips. He arose, in his completely stuffed cutaway, and deliberately brought forward his chair. He sat down facing his daughter and Mrs. Helen Davies. The latter lady was tremulous within but frigid without. Mr. Van Ploon cleared his throat.

"I believe that you are the acknowledged sponsor of Miss Sargent," he inquired.

Mrs. Davies nodded graciously.

"May I take the liberty of asking if your beautiful ward has formed a matrimonial alliance?"

"I am quite safe in saying that she has not." Thus Mrs. Davies, in a tone of untroubled reserve.

"Then I feel free to speak," went on the head of the Van Ploons, in whose family the ancient custom of having a head was still rigidly preserved. "I may state that we should feel it an honour to have Miss Sargent become a member of the Van Ploon family."

Since he seemed to have more to say, and since he seemed to have paused merely for rhetorical effect, Mrs. Helen Davies only nodded her head, suppressing, meantime, the look of exultation which struggled to leap into her face.

"My son Houston, I am authorised to state, is devoted to Miss Sargent. We have discussed the matter among us, and beg to assure you that Miss Sargent will be received with affection, if she should consent to honour us with this alliance."

The pause this time was not for rhetorical effect. It was a period, which was emphasised by the fact that

Nicholas leaned back in his chair to restore his hands to their natural resting place.

"We are honoured," observed Mrs. Davies, with excellent courtesy suppressing a gasp. The Van Ploons! The Van Ploons amid the stars! Why, they were so high in the social firmament that they dared live and talk and act like common people — and did it. To be above the need of pretence is greatness indeed! "I shall take up the matter with my niece."

"I thank you," responded the head of the Van Ploons. "You have rendered it possible for me to inform my son that he is at liberty to speak to Miss Sargent. He is anxious to call this evening, if he may," whereupon he smiled indulgently, and his daughter also smiled indulgently, and Mrs. Davies smiled indulgently.

"If you will pardon me, I will ascertain if my niece will be at liberty this evening," offered Mrs. Davies, rising.

"We shall be highly gratified," accepted Mr. Van Ploon, rising and bowing.

"We are so fond of Gail," added Miss Van Ploon, beaming with sincerity, and the beam was reflected in the face of her father, who nodded his spherical head emphatically.

Mrs. Helen Davies paused at the head of the stairs to calm herself. The Mrs. Waverly-Gaites' annual faded into dim obscurity. Mrs. Waverly-Gaites would beg Gail on her bended knees to attend the annual, and Mrs. Helen Davies could attend if she liked. She went into her own room, and took a drink of water, and sat down for thirty or forty seconds; then she went into Gail's suite, where she found that young lady, all unconscious of the honour which was about to befall her, reading a six hundred page critique of Chopin's music,

and calmly munching chocolates out of a basket decorated with eight shades of silk roses.

"Sit down and have a chocolate, Aunt Helen," hospitably offered Gail, slipping a marker in her book.

Mrs. Davies consumed a great deal of time in selecting a chocolate, but she did not sit down.

"Shall you be at liberty this evening, Gail?" she inquired, with much carelessness.

"Why?" and Gail, whose feet were stretched out and crossed, in lazy ease, looked up at her aunt sidewise from under her curving lashes.

Mrs. Davies hesitated a moment.

"Houston Van Ploon would like to call."

"Are they still downstairs?" Gail suddenly unveiled her eyes, and brought her slippers squarely in front of her divan. Also she sat bolt upright.

"Yes," and Mrs. Davies betrayed signs of nervousness.

"Are they making the appointment for Houston?"

"Yes." The word drawled.

"Why?" and Gail's brown eyes began to crackle.

Mrs. Davies thought it better to sit down.

"My dear, a great honour has come to you."

Gail leaned forward towards her aunt, and tilted her chin.

"Houston wants to propose, and he's sent his father and sister to find out if he may!" she charged.

"Yes," acknowledged Mrs. Davies, driven past the possibility of delay or preparation, and feeling herself unjustly on the defensive.

"I shall not be at home this evening," announced Gail decisively, and stretched out her feet again, and crossed her little grey slippers, and took a chocolate. "Or any other evening," she added.

Mrs. Davies lost her flutter immediately. This was too stupendously serious a matter to be weakly treated.

"My dear, you don't understand!" she protested, not in anger, but in patient reason. "Houston Van Ploon has been the unattainable match of New York. He is a gentleman in every particular, a desirable young man in every respect, and gifted with everything a young girl would want. He has so much money that you could buy a kingdom and be a queen, if you chose to amuse yourself that way. He has a dignified old family, which makes mere social position seem like an ignominious scramble for cotillion favours; and it is universally admitted that he is the most perfect of all the Van Ploons for many generations. Not exceptionally clever; but that is one of the reasons the Van Ploons are so particular to find a suitable matrimonial alliance for him."

Gail, nibbling daintily at her chocolate, closed her eyelids for a second, the long, brown lashes curved down on her cheeks, and from beneath them there escaped a sparkle like the snap of live coals, while the corners of her lips twitched in that little smile which she kept for her own enjoyment.

"You can not appreciate the compliment which has been paid you, Gail. Every *débutante* for the past five years has been most carefully considered by the Van Ploons, and I sincerely believe this to be the first time they have unanimously agreed on a choice. It is a matter of eugenics, Gail, but in addition to that, Mr. Van Ploon assures me that Houston is most fervently interested."

"How careless of them," criticised Gail. "They have neither asked for my measurements nor examined my teeth."

"Gail!" Her chaperon and sponsor was both shocked and stern.

"I positively decline to even discuss the Van Ploon eugenics," stated Gail, pushing aside her chocolates, while a red spot began to appear on her cheeks. "I shall not, as I stated before, be at home to Houston Van Ploon this evening — or any other evening."

"I shall not deliver that message," announced Mrs. Davies, setting her lips. "As your present sponsor, I shall insist that you take more time to consider a matter so important."

"I shall insist on refusing to consider it for one second," returned Gail quietly. "I am very fond of Houston Van Ploon, and I hope to remain so, but I wouldn't marry him under any circumstances. This is firm, flat, and final."

Mrs. Helen Davies dropped patient reason instantly. She was aware of an impulsive wish that Gail were in pinafores, and her own child, so she could box her ears.

"Gail, you compel me to lose my patience!" she declared. "When you came, I strained every influence I possessed to have you meet the most desirable eligibles this big city could offer, just as if you were my own daughter! I have succeeded in working miracles! I have given you an opportunity to interest the very best! You have interested them, but I have never seen such extravagance in the waste of opportunities! You have refused men whom thousands in the highest circles have sought; and now you refuse the very choice of them all! What or whom do you want?"

Gail's red spots were deepening, but she only clasped her knee in her interlocked fingers, her brown hair waving about her face, and her chin uptilted.

"You can't always expect to retain your youth, and

beauty and charm!" went on her Aunt Helen. "You can't expect to come to New York every year and look over the eligibles until you find one to suit your fastidious taste! You're capricious, you're ungrateful, and you're unsatisfactory!"

Gail's eyes turned suddenly moist, and the red flashed out of her cheeks.

"Oh, Aunt Helen!" she exclaimed in instant contrition. "I'm so very, very sorry that I am such a disappointment to you! But if I just can't marry Mr. Van Ploon, I can't, can I? Don't you see?" She was up now and down again, sitting on a hassock in front of Mrs. Davies, and the face which she upturned had in it so much of beautiful appeal that even her chaperon and sponsor was softened. "I was nasty a while ago, and I had no excuse for it, for you have been loving and sincere in your desire to make my future happy. I'm so very, very sorry! I'll tell you what I'll do! You may go down and tell Mr. Van Ploon and his daughter that I will see Houston this evening," and then she smiled; "but you mustn't say 'with pleasure.'"

CHAPTER XXVI

AN EMPIRE AND AN EMPRESS

THE soft air which blew upon Gail's cheek was like the first breath of spring, and there was the far-off prophecy of awakening in the very sunshine, as she sped out the river road with Allison in his powerful runabout. For days the weather had been like this, mild and still invigorating, and it had been a tremendous rest from the protracted crispness of the winter. There was the smell of moist earth, and the vague sense of stirring life, as if the roots and the seeds, deep in the ground, were answering to the thrill of coming birth.

"It's glorious!" exclaimed Gail, her cheeks answering to the caress of the air with a flush of blossom-like delicacy. She was particularly contented to-day. Allison had been so busy of late, and she had missed him. With all his strength, he was restful.

"I feel like a new man at this time of the year," returned Allison, glancing at Gail with cool appreciation. A car full of men passed them, and the looks they cast in his runabout pleased him. "Gail, do you remember the first time we drove out here?"

"Indeed yes," she laughed. "With the snow in our eyes, and the roads all white, with the lights gleaming through the flakes like Arctic will-o'-the-wisps. We ran away that night, and dined at Roseleaf Inn, and wor-

ried the folks to death, for fear we had had an accident."

"I had more than an accident that night," said Allison. "I had a total wreck."

Gail glanced at him quickly, but his face was clear of any apparent purpose. He was gazing straight ahead, his clean-cut profile, always a pleasant thing to look upon, set against the shifting background of rocky banks as if it were the one steadfast and unalterable thing in the universe; and he was smiling introspectively.

"It was about here that it happened," he went on. "I think I'd been bragging a little, and I think you meant to slyly prick my balloon, which I will admit seemed a kind and charitable thing to do."

"What was it?" wondered Gail, trying to recall that unimportant conversation.

"Oh, a gentle intimation that I hadn't done so much," he laughed. "I had just finished consolidating all the traction cars in New York, subways, L's, and surface: and I felt cocky about it. I even remarked that I had achieved the dream of my life, and intended to rest a while. All you said was, 'Why?'" and his laugh pealed out. Four birds in a wayside bush sprang into the air and flew on ahead.

"I used to be conspicuous for impertinence," smiled Gail. "I'm trying to reform."

"I'm glad you hadn't started when I met you," returned Allison, steering around a sharp stone with the firm accuracy which Gail had so often admired. "I never had so stinging a reproof as that little why. It did me more good than any sermon I ever heard."

"That's positively startling," replied Gail lightly. "I usually hear from my impertinences, long after, as a source of discomfort."

“‘Why?’” repeated Allison. “I took that why home with me. If you had said, ‘Why should you rest a while?’ or ‘Why should you stop when you’ve just made a start?’ or something of that nature, it might not have impressed me so much; but just the one unexplained word was like a barbed hook in my mind. It wouldn’t come out. I asked myself that why until daylight, and I found no answer. Why, when I was young and strong, and had only tasted of victory, should I sit by the fireside and call myself old? If I had ability to conquer this situation with so much ease, why should I call it a great accomplishment; for great accomplishments are measured by the power employed.”

Gail looked at him in questioning perplexity. She could not gather what he meant, but she had a sense of something big, and once more she was impressed with the tremendous reserve force in the man. His clear grey eyes were fixed on the road ahead, and the very symbol of him seemed to be this driving; top speed, a long road, a steady hand, a cool determination, a sublime disregard of hills and valleys which made them all a level road.

“Why? That word set me out on a new principle that never, while I had strength in me, would I consider my work finished, no matter how great an achievement I had made. I am still at work.”

Something within her leaped up in answer to the thrill of exultation in his voice. To have been the inspiration of great deeds, even by so simple an agency as the accidental use of a word, was in itself an exalting thing, though an humbling one, too. And there were great deeds. She was sure of that as she looked at him. He was too calm about it, and too secure to have been speaking of trifles.

"When I was a boy I lived on ancient history," he went on, with a smile for the bygone dreamer he had been. "I wanted to be a soldier, a great general, a warrior, in the sturdy old sense, and my one hero was Alexander the Great, because he conquered the world! That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to go out and fight and kill, and bring kingdom after kingdom under my sway, and finally set myself on a mighty throne, which should have for its boundaries the north and the south pole! When I grew older, and found how small was the world which Alexander had conquered, not much bigger than the original thirteen states, I grew rather disillusioned, particularly as I was working at about that time for a dollar and a quarter a day. I spent a few busy years, and had forgotten the dream; then you said 'why' and it all came back."

"Hurry!" commanded Gail. "Curiosity is bad for me."

Allison laughed heartily at her impatience. He had meant to arouse her interest, and he had done so. She would not have confessed it, but she was fascinated by the thing he had held in reserve. It was like the cruelty of telling a child of a toy in a trunk which is still at the station.

"I conquered it," he told her, with an assumption of nonchalance which did not deceive her. There was too much of undervibration in his tone, and the eyes which he turned upon her were glowing in spite of his smile. "In my hand I hold control of the transportation of the world! If a pound of freight is started westward or eastward from New York, addressed to me at its starting point, it will circle the globe, and on every mile of its passage it will pay tribute to me. If a man starts to travel north or south or east or west,

anywhere on the five continents or the seven seas, he must pay tribute to me. With that shipment of every necessity and luxury under my control, I control the necessities and luxuries themselves; so there is no human being in the world who can escape contributing tithes to the monster company I have consolidated."

He was disappointed, for a moment. She seemed almost unimpressed. In reality, she was struggling to comprehend what he had just said to her. It was so incredibly huge in its proportions, so gigantic, so extravagantly far reaching that she had only words in her ears. He must be speaking in hyperbole.

"I don't understand," she said.

"It is difficult to grasp," he admitted. "When I first conceived of it, in answer to your why, I could not myself comprehend any more than that I had thought of an absurdity, like the lover who wished that the sea were ink and the land a pen that he might seize it, and write across the sky 'I love you!' It was as fantastic as that in my mind, at first, and in order to reduce the idea to actual thought, I had to break it into fragments; and that is the way I set about my campaign."

Gail was listening eagerly now. She was beginning to dimly comprehend that Allison had actually wrought a miracle of commerce, probably the most stupendous in this entire century of commercial miracles; and her admiration of him grew. She had always admired great force, great strength, great power, and here, unfolding before her, was the evidence of it at its zenith.

"Let me build it up, step by step, for you. Incidentally, I'll give you some confidential news which you will be reading in months to come. I hope," and he laughed, "that you will not tell your friends the reporters about it."

"Cross my heart, I won't," she gaily replied. The sting of her one big newspaper experience had begun to die away.

"When you asked me why, I was trying to secure Vedder Court for a terminal station for my city traction lines. Vedder Court quickly became, in my imagination, the terminal point not only of the city traction lines, but of the world's transportation. From that I would run a railroad tube to the mainland, so that I could land passengers, not only in the heart of New York, but at the platforms of every street car and L and subway train."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Gail, in enthusiasm. This was an idea she could grasp. "And have you secured Vedder Court?"

"It's a matter of days," he returned carelessly. "The next step was the trans-continental line. I built it up, piece by piece, and to-day, under my own personal control, with sufficient stock to elect my own directors, who will jump when I crack the whip, I possess a railroad line from the Atlantic to the Pacific so direct, so straight, and so allied with ninety-five per cent. of the freight interests of the United States that, within two years, there will not be a car wheel turning in America which does not do so at the command of the A.-P. Railroad. That is the first step leading out of Vedder Court. The news of that consolidation will be in to-morrow morning's papers, and from that minute on, the water will begin to drip from railroad stocks."

"How about Uncle Jim's road?" Gail suddenly interrupted.

"I am taking care of him," he told her easily. "From Vedder Court run subways along the docks."

"I see!" interrupted Gail. "You have secured con-

trol of the steamship companies, of the foreign railroads, of everything which hauls and carries!"

"Airships excepted," he laughingly informed her. "Gail, it's an empire, and none so great ever existed in all the world! The giant monopolies of which so much has been said, are only parts of it, like principalities in a kingdom. There isn't a nook or corner on the globe where one finger of my giant does not rest. The armies which swept down from the north and devastated Europe, the hoards which spread from Rome, the legions which marched to Moscow, even those mighty armies of the Iliad and the Odyssey were insignificant as compared to the sway of this tremendous organisation! All commerce, all finance, all politics, must bow the knee to it, and serve it! Maps will be shifted for its needs. Nations will rise and fall as it shall decree, and the whole world, every last creature of it, shall feed it and be fed by it!"

He paused, and turned to her with a positive radiance on the face which she had always considered heavy. She had looked on him as a highly successful money-grubber, as a commercial genius, as a magician of manipulation, as a master of men; but he was more than all these; he was a poet, whose rude epics were written in the metre of whirling wheels and flying engines and pounding propellers; a poet whose dreams extended beyond the confines of imagination itself; and then, above that, a sorcerer who builded what he dreamed!

There is a magic thrill in creation. It extends beyond the creator to the created, and it inspires all who come in contact with it. Gail's eager mind traversed again and again the girdle he had looped around the world, darting into all its intricacies and ramifications, until she, too, had pursued it into all the obscure nooks

and crannies, and saw the most remote and distant peoples dependent upon it, and paying toll to it, and swaying to its command. This was a dream worthy of accomplishment; a dream beyond which there could be no superlative; and the man beside her had dreamed it, and had builded it; and all this would not have happened if she had not given him the hint with one potent word which had spurred him, and set his marvellously constructive mind to work.

In so far they were partners in this mighty enterprise, and he had been magnanimous enough to acknowledge her part in it. It drew them strangely near. It was a universe, in the conception of which no other minds than theirs had dabbled, in the modelling of which no other hand had been thrust. What agile mind, gifted with ambition, and broad conception, and the restlessness which, in her, had not only ranged world wide but beyond the æther and across the vast seas of superstition and ignorance and credulity to God himself; what mind such as this could resist the insidious flattery of that mighty collaboration?

She was silent now, and he left her silent, brooding, himself, upon the vast scope of his dreaming, and planning still to centre more and more the fruits of that dreaming within his own eager hand.

Roscleaf Inn. Gail recognised it with a smile as they turned in at the drive. She was glad that they had come here, for it was linked in her mind with the beginnings of that great project of which she had been the impulse, and in which the thing in her that had been denied opportunity because she was a woman, claimed a hungry share. At his suggestion — it was more like a command, but she scarcely noticed — she telephoned that she was going to remain to dinner with Allison;



She telephoned that she was going to remain to dinner with Allison ;
and they enjoyed a two hour chat of many things

and then they enjoyed a two-hour chat of many things, trivial in themselves, but fraught now with delightful meaning, because they had to think on so many unexpressed things, larger than these idle people about them could conceive, or grasp if they knew.

Homeward again in the starlit night, still in that whirl of exultation. It was somewhat chillier now, and Allison bundled her into the machine with rough tenderness. She felt the thrill of him as he sat beside her, and the firm strength with which he controlled the swiftly speeding runabout, was part her strength. They were kindred spirits, these two, soaring above the affairs of earth in the serene complacency of those who make trifles of vastness itself. They did not talk much, for they had not much to talk about. The details of a scheme so comprehensive as Allison's were not things to be explained, they were things to be seen in a vision. Once she asked him about the bringing of the foreign railroads into the combination, and he told her that this would only be accomplished by a political upheaval, which would take place next month, and would probably involve the whole of Europe. It was another detail; and it seemed quite natural. She was so interested that he told her all about his foreign visitors.

In the Park, Allison stopped at the little outlook house where they had climbed on that snowy night, and they stood there, with the stars above and the trees below and the twinkling lights stretching out to the horizon, all alone above the world of civilisation. Below sounded the clang of street cars, and far off to the left, high in the air, there gleamed the lights of a curving L train. That was a part of Allison's world which he had long since conquered, a part which he already held in the hollow of his hand; and the fact that

every moving thing which clung upon a track in all this vast panorama was under his dominion, served only to illustrate and make plain the marvel of the accomplishment which was now under way. Beyond that dim horizon lay another and still another, and in them all, wherever things moved or were transported, the lift of Allison's finger was to start and stop the wheels, to the uttermost confines of the earth! Oh, it was wonderful; wonderful! And she was part of it!

It was there that he proposed to her. It did not surprise her. She had known it when they had entered the Park, and that this was the place.

He told her that all this empire was being builded to lay at her feet, that she was the empress of it and he the emperor, but that their joy was to be not in the sway, not in the sceptre and crown, but in the doing, and in the having done, and in the conceiving and having conceived!

Was this a cold painting of pomp and glory and advantage and reward? He added to it the fire of a lover, and to that the force and mastery and compulsion of his dynamic power. She felt again the potent thrill of him, and the might and sweep and drive of him, and with the hot, tumbling words of love in her ears, and her senses a-reel, and her mind in its whirling exultation, she felt between them a sympathy and a union which it was not in human strength to deny! Something held her back, something made her withhold the word of promise, on the plea that she must have more time to think, to consider, to straighten out the tangle of her mind; but she suffered him to sweep her in his arms, and rain hot kisses upon her face, and to tell her, over and over and over and over, that she belonged to him, forever and forever!

CHAPTER XXVII

ALLISON'S PRIVATE AND PARTICULAR DEVIL

THE free and entirely uncurbed enjoyed an unusual treat. It had a sensation which did not need to be supported by a hectic imagination or a lurid vocabulary. Vedder Court had been condemned for the use of the Municipal Transportation Company! A new eight track, double-deck tube was to be constructed through Crescent Island to the mainland!

Grand climax! Through this tube and into Vedder Court, at the platforms of the surface and L and subway cars, was to come the passenger trains of the new Atlantic-Pacific Railroad, a line three hundred miles shorter than any now stretching between Broadway and the Golden Gate! Any reader of the daily press, of whom there are several, knows precisely what the free and entirely uncurbed did with this bit of simon-pure information. The glittering details began on the first page, turned on the second, continued on the fourth, jumped over to the seventh, and finished back among the real estate ads. It began early in the morning, and it continued until late at night, fresh details piling upon each other in mad profusion, their importance limited only by the restrictions of type!

Extra! The trick by which the A.-P. ran through the mountains over the Inland Pacific's track!

Extra, extra! The compulsion by which the Mid-

continent was brought to complete the big gap in the new A.-P. system!

Tremendous extra! The contracts of freightage, subject strictly to the Inter-State Commerce law, between the A.-P. and the cereal trust, the metal trust, the fuel trust, the cloth trust, and all the other iniquitous combinations in restraint of everything! Wow! Zowie! That was the hot one! The A.-P. was the main stem, and within thirteen seconds of the appearance on the streets of the tremendous extra, every other fragile branchlet of a railroad not under the immediate protection of the A.-P., was reduced to a shrivel, and its stocks began to drop with the sickening plunge of an unopened parachute!

Gail Sargent kept Nanette on the rush for extras from the first yell on the streets, and she read every word, including the underlines on the miscellaneous portraits of Allison and the funny pi-lines which invariably occurred in the middle of the most interesting sentences.

It was true, all true! Here was the first step in Allison's tremendous project an accomplished fact. The rest of it would be gradually revealed, from day to day, as suited his needs, and the empire he had planned would spread, until its circles touched, and overlapped, and broke into an intricate webbing, over all the land and water of the earth! And she was to be the Empress!

Was she? Through all the night she had battled that question, and the battle had left traces of darkness around her luminous eyes. First, she had been in the swirl of his tremendous compulsion, overwhelmed by the sheer physical force of him, captured not by siege but by sortie. Then had come the dazzling splendour of his great plan,

a temptation of power, of might, of unlimited rulership, in the spoils of which, and the honour of which, and the glory of which, she would share. Next, in the midst of her expanding anticipation, there had come, as out of a clear sky, a sudden inexplicable fear. It was a shrinking, almost like a chill, which had attacked her. Allison himself! The sheer physical dominance of him; the tempestuous mastery of him; and again she felt that breathless sensation of utter helplessness which she had experienced in the little lookout house. It was as if he were pulling the very life out of her, to the upbuilding of his own strength! It was in the very nature of him to sweep her away by storm; it was a part of his very bigness. He was colossal, gigantic, towering! And she had conquered this giant, had been the motive of his strength, the very pinnacle of his cloud-topping ambition! There was pride in that, pride and to spare. It distressed her that again and again came that impulse of fear, that shrinking. A new thought dawned. Perhaps this was the thing which she had desired, the thing for which she had been waiting; to be taken, and crushed.

Another disturbance came to her. This mighty plan of Allison's. The exaltation of achievement, the dazzling glory of accomplishment, had blinded her to the processes by which the end must be gained, and the fact which drew her attention to this was the remembrance that her Uncle Jim was to be protected! What about the others? For Allison to gain control and dominion over thousands of now segregated interests, those thousands must lose their own control. What would become of them?

Pshaw! That was the way of the world, particularly of the commercial world. As her father had

often expressed it, the big fish ate the little fish because fish was the only food for fish; and Allison was the biggest one of them all. That was the way of him; to devour that he might live. Even here, far from him, and safe in her dainty little chintz hung suite, she felt the dominance of him. Turn her eyes where she would, with the lids open or closed, he filled her vision, not in his normal stature, but grown to the dimensions of his force, filling the sky, the earth, the sea, blotting out everything! There was no escaping him. He had come to claim her, and she belonged to him; that is, unless she chose to call upon a strength still latent in her. There was a something else which she could not define just now, which seemed to call to her persistently through the darkness. A voice—but the colossus stood between! She wondered if she were happy. She wondered what her Aunt Helen would say. Bigness and power and dominance; she had admired them all her life.

Late in the afternoon Jim Sargent came home, drawn, fagged, and with hollows under his eyes. He had a violent headache, and he looked ten years older. He walked slowly into the library where Mrs. Sargent and Mrs. Davies and Gail were discussing the future of Vedder Court, and dropped into a chair.

Grace Sargent rang a bell instantly. When Jim felt that way, he needed a hot drink first of all.

"What is the matter?" she asked him, the creases of worry flashing into her brow.

"It's been a hard day," he explained, forcing himself, with an effort, to answer. Years of persistent experience had taught him to follow the line of least resistance. "There has been a panic on 'Change. Railroads are going to smash all up and down the line.

Allison's new A.-P. road. It's the star piracy of the century. Allison has brought into the railroad game the same rough-shod methods he used in his traction manipulations."

"Has your company been hurt, Jim?" asked his wife, fully prepared for the worst, and making up her mind to bear up bravely under it.

"Not yet," replied Sargent, and he passed his hand over his brow. He was already making a tremendous effort to brace himself for to-morrow's ordeal. "I escaped to-day by an accident. By some mistake the Towando Valley was mentioned as belonging to the new A.-P. combination. Of course I didn't correct it, but by to-morrow they'll know."

"Mr. Allison was responsible for that statement," Gail serenely informed her uncle. "He promised he'd take care of you."

"Great guns!" exploded her uncle. "What did you know about this thing?"

"All of it," smiled Gail. She had known that Allison would keep his word, but it gave her a strange sense of relief that he had done so.

Her Aunt Helen turned to her with a commanding eye; but Gail merely dimpled.

"Of course I couldn't say anything," went on Gail. "It was all in confidence. Isn't it glorious, Uncle Jim!"

"You wouldn't have thought so if you'd been down town to-day," responded her uncle, trying again to erase from his brow the damage which had been done to his nerves. "They wanted to mob Allison! He has cut the ground from under the entire railroad business of the United States! Their stocks have deflated an aggregate of billions of dollars, and the slump is

permanent! He has bankrupted a host of men, rifled the pockets of a million poor investors; he has demoralised the entire transportation commerce of the United States; and he gave no one the show of a rat in a trap!"

"Isn't that business?" asked Gail, the red spots beginning to come into her cheeks.

"Not quite!" snapped her Uncle Jim. "Fiction has made that the universal idea, but there are decent men in business. The majority of them are, even in railroading. Most roads are organised and conducted for the sole purpose of carrying freight and passengers at a profit for the stockholders, and spectacular stock jobbing deals are the exception rather than the rule."

"Has Mr. Allison been more unfair than others who have made big consolidations?" demanded Gail, again aware of the severely inquiring eye of Aunt Helen.

"Rotten!" replied her uncle, with an emphasis in which there was much of personal feeling. "He has taken tricky advantage of every unprotected loophole. He won from the Inland Pacific, at the mere cost of trackage, a passage which the Inland built through the mountains by brilliant engineering and at an almost countless cost."

"Isn't that accounted clever?" asked Gail.

"So is the work of a confidence man or a wire-tapper!" was the retort. "But they are sent to jail just the same. The Inland created something. It built, with brains and money and force, and sincere commercial enterprise, a line which won it a well-earned supremacy of the Pacific trade. It was entitled to keep it; yet Allison, by making with it a tricky contract for the restricted use of the key to its su-

premacry, uses that very device to destroy it. He has bankrupted, or will have done so, a two thousand mile railroad system, which is of tremendous commercial value to the country, in order to use a hundred miles of its track and remove it from competition! Allison has created nothing. He has only seized, by stealth, what others have created. He is not even a commercial highwayman. He is a commercial pick-pocket!"

Gail had paled by now.

"Tell me one thing," she demanded. "Wouldn't any of the railroad men have employed this trick if they had been shrewd enough to think of it?"

"A lot of them," was the admission, after an awkward pause. "Does that make it morally and ethically correct?"

"You may be prejudiced, Jim," interpolated Aunt Helen, moving closer to Gail. "If they are all playing the game that way, I don't see why Mr. Allison shouldn't receive applause for clever play."

"You bet I'm prejudiced!" snarled Sargent, overcoming his weariness and pacing up and down the library floor. "He came near playing my road the same trick he did the Inland Pacific. He secured control of the L. and C., because it has a twenty-year contract for passage over fifty miles of our track. He'd throw the rest of our line away like a peanut hull, if he had not promised Gail to protect me. I'm an object of charity!"

"Oh!" It was a scarcely audible cry of pain. Aunt Helen moved closer, and patted her hand. Gail did not notice the action.

"Why did he make you that promise, Gail?" de-

manded her uncle, turning on her suddenly, with a physical motion so much like her father's that she was startled.

"He wants me to marry him," faltered Gail.

Aunt Grace sat down by the other side of Gail.

"Have you accepted him, dear?" she asked.

There was a lump in Gail's throat. She could not answer!

"She'll never marry him with my consent!" stormed her Uncle Jim. "Nor with Miles's! The fellow's an unscrupulous scoundrel! He's made of cruelty from his toes to his hair! He stops at nothing! He even robbed Market Square Church of six million dollars!"

Gail's head suddenly went up in startled inquiry. She wanted to still defend Allison; but she dreaded what was to come.

"We wouldn't sell him Vedder Court at his price; so he took it from us at six million less than he originally offered. He did that by a trick, too."

All three women looked up at him in breathless interest.

"He had the city condemn Vedder Court," went on Sargent. "If he had condemned it outright for the Municipal Transportation Company, he would have had to pay us about the amount of his original offer; but his own private and particular devil put the idea into his head that the Vedder Court tenements should be torn down anyhow, for the good of the public! So he had the buildings condemned first, destroying six million dollars' worth of value; then he had the ground condemned! Tim Corman probably got about a million dollars for that humanitarian job!"

A wild fit of sobbing startled them all.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVE

ALLISON swept Gail into his arms, and rained hot kisses upon her, crushing her closely to him. She offered no resistance, and the very fact that she held so supinely in his arms, made Allison release her sooner than he might otherwise have done. She had known that this experience must come, that no look or gesture or word of hers could ward it off.

"You must never do that again," she told him, stepping back from him, and regaining her breath with an effort. She had lingered in the front parlours to receive him before her Uncle Jim should know that he was in the house, and she had led him straight into the little tête-à-tête reception room. She meant to free herself quickly.

"Why not?" he laughed, and advanced toward her, taking her attitude lightly, ascribing her action to a girlish whim, confident in his power over her. He meant to dispose of her coyness by taking her in his arms again. She belonged to him.

"Mr. Allison." The tone was cold enough, and deadly in earnest enough to arrest him.

"What's the matter, Gail?" he protested, ready to humour her, to listen to what she had to say, to smooth matters out.

"You have no right," she told him.

"Yes I have," he jovially assured her. "I hope I don't have to wait until after marriage for a kiss. If that's the case I'll take you out and marry you right now."

There was an infection in his laugh, contagion in the assumption that all was right between them, and that any difference was one which could be straightened out with jolly patience, and Gail, though her determination would not have changed, might have softened toward him, had she not seen in his face a look which paled her lips. Ever since last night he had anticipated her, had rejoiced in his possession of her, had dreamed on the time when he should take her for his own; and his eyes were cloudy with his thoughts of her.

"Let us have a clear understanding, Mr. Allison." She was quite erect, and looking him directly in the eyes. Her own were deep and troubled, and the dark trace which had been about them in the morning had deepened. "I told you last night that I should need time in which to decide; and I have decided. I shall not marry you"

He returned her gaze for a moment, and his brow clouded.

"You've changed since last night," he charged her.

"Possibly," she admitted. "It is more likely, however, that I have merely crystallised. I prefer not to discuss it." She saw on his face the growing instinct to humiliate her.

"You must discuss it," he insisted. "Last night when I took you in my arms you made no objection. I was justified in doing it again to-night. You're not a fool. You knew from the first that I wanted you, and you encouraged me. Now, I'm entitled to know what has made the change."

The telltale red spots began to appear in her cheeks.

"You," she told him. "Last night, your scheme of world empire seemed a wonderful thing to me, but since then I've discovered that it cannot be built without dishonesty and cruelty; and you've used both."

His brow cleared. He laughed heartily.

"You've been reading the papers. There isn't a man in the financial field who wouldn't do everything I've done; and be proud of it. I can make you see this in the right light, Gail."

"It's a proof of your moral callousness that you think so," she informed him. "Can you make me see it in the right light that you even used me, of whom you pretended to think sacredly enough to marry, to help you in your most despicable trick of all?"

"Look here," he protested. "That would be impossible! You're misinformed."

"I wish I were," she returned. "Unfortunately, it is a matter of direct knowledge. You caused Veder Court to be torn down because I thought it should be wiped out of existence, and in the process you cheated Market Square Church out of six million dollars!"

He could not have been more shocked if she had struck him.

"I knew you did not understand," he kindly reproved her. "I didn't want those old buildings. They couldn't have sold them for the wreckage price. When you suggested that they should be torn down, I saw it. They were a public menace, and the public was right with the movement. The condemnation price will cover all they could get from the property from any source. You see, you don't understand business," and his tone was forgiving. "I'd have been foolish to pay six million dollars for something I couldn't use. You know,

Gail, when the building commissioners came to look over those buildings, they were shocked! Some of them wouldn't have stood up another year. It was only the political influence of Clark and Chisholm and a few of the other big guns of the congregation, which kept them from being condemned long ago. You shouldn't interfere in business. It always creates trouble between man and wife," and he advanced to put his arm around her, and soothe her.

The hand with which she warded him off was effective this time. She stared at him in wonder. It seemed inconceivable that the moral sense of any intelligent man should be so blunted.

"There's another reason," she told him, despairing of making him realise that he had done anything out of the way. "I do not love you. I could not."

For just a moment he was checked; then his jaws set.

"That is something you must learn. You have young notions of love, gleaned from poetry and fiction. You conceive it to be an ideal stage of existence, a mysterious something almost too delicate for perception by the human senses. I will teach you love, Gail! Look," and he stretched up his firm arm, as if in his grip he already held the reins of the mighty empire he was hewing out for her. "Love is a thing of strength, of power, of desire which shakes, and burns, and consumes with fever! It is like the lust to kill! It whips, and it goads, and it drives! It creates! It puts new images into the brain; it puts new strength into sinews; it puts new life into the blood! It cries out! It demands! It has caused me to turn back from middle-age to youth, to renew all my ambitions, a thousandfold enhanced by my maturity! It has caused me

to grapple the world by the throat, and shake it, throttle it; so that I might drag it, quivering, to your feet and say, this is yours; kick it! That is love, Gail! It drives one on to do great deeds! It gives one the impulse to recognise no bounds, no bars, no obstacles! It has put all my being into the attainment of things big enough to show you the force of my will, and what it could conquer! Do you suppose that, with such love driving me on, any objection which you may make will stop me? No! I set out to attain you as the summit of my desire, the one thing in this world I want, and will have!"

Again that great fear of him possessed Gail. She feared many things. She feared that, in spite of her determination, he would still have her, and in that possibility alone lay all the other fears, fears so gruesome that she did not dare see them clearly! She knew that she must retain absolute control of herself.

"I shall not discuss the matter any further," she quietly said, and walking straight towards the door, passed by him, quite within the reach of his arm, without either looking at him or away from him. Something within his own strength respected hers, in spite of him. "I have said all that I have to say."

"So have I," he replied, coming closer to her as she stood in the doorway, and he gazed down at her with eyes in which there was insolent determination, and cruelty. "I have said that I mean to have you, and I will."

Without a word, she went into the hall. He followed her, and took his hat.

"Good evening," he said formally.

"Good evening," she replied, and he went out of the door.

When he had gone, she flew up to her rooms, her first coherent thought being that she had accomplished it! She had seen Allison, and had given him her definite answer, and had gotten him out of the house while the others were back in the billiard room. She had held up splendidly, but she was weak now, and quivering in every limb, and she sank on her divan, supported on one outstretched arm; and in this uncomfortable position, she took up the eternal question of Gail. The angry tears of mortification sprang into her eyes!

A half hour later her Aunt Grace came up, and found her in the same position.

"Mrs. Boyd and Doctor Boyd are downstairs, dear," she announced.

Gail straightened up with difficulty. Her arm was numb.

"Please make my excuses, Aunty," she begged.

"What's the matter?" asked Aunt Grace, the creases jumping into her brow as if they lay somewhere in the roots of her hair, ready to spring down at an instant's notice. "Aren't you feeling well? Shall I get you something?"

"No, thank you," smiled Gail wanly. "I'm just a little fatigued."

"Then don't you come a step," and Aunt Grace beamed down on her niece with infinite tenderness. She had an intuition, these days, that the girl was troubled; and her sympathies were ready for instant production. "You'll have to tell me what to say, though. I'm so clumsy at it."

"Just tell them the truth," smiled Gail, and punching two pillows together, she stretched herself at full length on the divan.

Her Aunt Grace regarded her with a puzzled expression for a moment, and then she laughed.

"I see; you're lying down." She looked at Gail thoughtfully for a moment. "Dear, could you close your eyes?"

"Certainly," agreed Gail, and the brown lashes curved down on her cheeks, though there was a sharp little glint from under the edges of her lids.

Her Aunt Grace stooped and kissed the smooth white brow, then she went downstairs and entered the library.

"Gail is lying down," she primly reported. "Her eyes are closed."

The library was quite steadily devoted to Vedder Court to-night. A highly important change had come into the fortunes of Market Square Church. It was as if a stone had been thrown into a group of cardboard houses. All the years of planning had gone the way of the wind, and the card houses had all to be built over again. The Cathedral had receded by a good five years, unless the force and fire of the Reverend Smith Boyd should be sufficient to coax capital out of the pockets of his millionaire congregation; and, in fact, that quite normal plan was already under advisement.

The five of this impromptu counsel were deep in the matter of ways and means, when a slender apparition, in clinging grey, came down the stairs. It was Gail, who, for some reason unknown, even to her, had decided that she was selfish; and the Reverend Smith Boyd's heart ached as he saw the pallor on her delicately tinted cheeks and the dark tracing about her brown eyes. She slipped quietly in among them, her brown hair loosely waved, so that unexpected threads of gold shone in it when she passed under the chandelier, and she

greeted the callers pleasantly, and sat down in the corner, very silent. She was glad that she had come. It was restful in this little circle of friends.

A noise filled the hall, and even the lights of the library seemed to brighten, as Lucile and Ted, Arly and Gerald, and Dick Rodley, came tumbling in, laughing and chattering, and carrying hilarity in front of them like a wave. Gail shoved her tangle of thoughts still further back in her head, and the sparkle returned into her eyes.

"We're bringing you a personal invitation to Arly and Gerald's yacht party," jabbered Lucile, kissing everybody in reach except the Reverend Smith Boyd.

"You might let Arly extend the invitation herself," objected Ted.

"I've given the pleasure to Gerald," laughed Arly, with a vivacious glance at that smiling gentleman. "He does it so much better. Now listen."

"It's a little informal week-end party, on the *White-cap*," Gerald informed them, with a new something in him which quite satisfactorily took the place of cordiality. "Sort of a farewell affair. Arly and I are about to take a selfish two months' cruise, all by ourselves," and he glanced fondly at the handsome black-haired young woman under discussion. "We should be pleased to have you join us," and he included Mrs. Boyd and the young rector with a nod.

"Of course we'll come," agreed Gail. "Doctor Boyd, can't you arrange for a week-end party once in your life?"

"Unfortunately custom has decreed that week-end parties shall cover Sundays," he regretted, but there was a calculating look in his eye which sent Lucile over to him.

"Play hooky just once," she begged. "This is only a family crowd, the Babbitts and Marion Kenneth, and we who are here."

The Reverend Smith Boyd looked at his mother, and that lady brightened visibly.

"When is it to be?" he asked.

"Saturday," Arly informed him, joining Lucile, who had sat on the arm of Mrs. Boyd's chair. Arly sat on the other one, and Gerald Fosland, with an entirely new appreciation of beauty, thought he had never seen a prettier picture than the sweet-faced old lady with the fresh and charming young women on either side of her.

The Reverend Smith Boyd glanced, for just an instant, at Gail, who was now sitting on the leather couch leaning confidently against her Aunt Grace. He had been at some pains to avoid this young lady recently, for it is natural to spare one's self distress; but there was a look of loneliness about her which sent his heart out to her in quick sympathy.

"I think I'll play hooky," he announced, with a twinkle in the eyes which he now cast upon his mother.

"That's being a good sport," approved Ted. "Stay away a Sunday or two, and Market Square Church will appreciate you better."

"Let's have some music," demanded Lucile.

"Gail and Doctor Boyd must sing for you," announced Aunt Grace, in whom there was a trace of wistfulness. "They do sing so beautifully together!"

"I'm afraid I can't to-night," refused Gail hastily, and indeed she had good reason why her voice should not have its firm and true quality just now. "I will accompany Doctor Boyd, though, with pleasure," and she started toward the music room.

The Reverend Smith Boyd was cut off from the ordinary lies about not being in good voice, and suffering from a slight cold, and such things. He hesitated a moment, and then he followed.

The Bedouin Love Song, the Garden of Sleep, and others of the solo repertoire which Gail had selected for him, came pulsing out of the music room, first hesitantly, and then with more strength, as the friendly nearness between himself and the accompanist became better established.

Presently, the listeners in the library noticed an unusual pause between the songs, a low voiced discussion, and then, the two perfectly blended voices rose in a harmony so perfect that there was moisture in the eyes of two of the ladies present.

CHAPTER XXIX

GAIL FIRST!

ALLISON, springing forward with a jerk as he left Jim Sargent's house, headed his long, low run-about up the Avenue. He raced into the Park, and glanced up at the lookout house as he sped on past; but it was only a fleeting look. He needed no reminder of Gail, and he scarcely noticed that he was following the same road which they had so often taken together. His only impulse had been to drive somewhere at top speed, and he had automatically chosen this path. The night was damp and chill, but his evening top coat was open, revealing the white glint of his shirt front. He did not seem to mind. As he passed Roseleaf Inn, he slowed down. The roadhouse may have given him, and probably did, another reminder of Gail, in such a manner as to concrete him into logical thought; for he slowed down the terrific speed which had been the accompaniment of his unreasoning emotion. The driving required too much concentration for specific thought.

With this turning of his mental attitude, even the slow running of the car seemed to disturb him, and, about half a mile past Roseleaf Inn, he came slowly to a stop, sitting at the wheel, with his head bent slightly forward, and staring at the spot where the roadway had ceased to roll beneath his machine. Presently he

became aware of the cold, and running his car to the side of the road, he stepped out, and, buttoning his coat around him, crossed a fence and walked through the narrow strip of trees to the river bank, where he stood for a moment looking out upon the misty Hudson, sparkling under the moonlight. He began to walk up and down the bank presently, the turf sinking spongily under his feet, and it was noticeable that his pace grew more and more rapid, until he was striding at a furious rate of speed.

The man was in a torment of passion. He had spent a lifetime in the deliberate acquisition of everything upon which he had set his will; and it was one of the things upon which he had built his success, that, once he had fixed his desire deliberately upon anything, he had held unwaveringly to that object, employing all the forces of which strong men are capable; patient waiting, dogged persistence, or vicious grappling, whichever was best adapted to gain his ends.

Gail! If there had been tender thoughts of her, they were gone now. He saw her in a thousand enchantments; sitting beside him, clad in the white furs which added such piquancy to her rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes; lounging in the library, in some filmy, clinging robe which defined her grace, half concealing and half suggesting the long, delicately curving lines which had so appealed to his ruthlessness; sitting at the piano, her beautiful small head slightly bent forward, displaying the requisite line at the nape of her neck, her brown hair waving backward to a simple knot, her rounded white arms free from the elbows, and her slender fingers flashing over the keys; coming down the stairway, in the filmy cream lace gown which had made her seem so girlishly fragile, her daintily blue slippers and

her beautifully turned ankles giving a hint of the grace and suppleness of her whole self; in her black beaded ball costume, its sparkling deadness displaying the exquisite ivory tints and beautiful colouring of her neck and shoulders and bosom with startling effectiveness. In these and a thousand other glowing pictures he saw her, and with every added picture there came a new pain in his thought of her.

He felt the warmth of her hand upon his arm, the brush of her shoulder against his own, the mere elbow touch as she sat beside him in the car, the many little careless contacts of daily life, unconscious to her, but to him fraught always with flame; and, finally, that maddening moment when he had crushed her in his arms, and so had made, for all time to come, the possession of her a necessity almost maniacal in the violence of its determination! He heard the sound of her voice, in all its enchanting cadences, from the sweetness of her murmured asides to the ring of her laugh; and the delicate fragrance which was a part of her overwhelmed him now, in remembrance, like an unnerving faintness!

It was so that he had centred his mind upon her, and himself and his will, until, in all creation, there was nothing else but that was trivial; ambition, power, wealth, fame, the command of empires and of men, were nothing, except as they might lead to her!

As a boy Allison had been endowed with extraordinary strength. From a mother who had married beneath her socially he had inherited a certain redeeming refinement of taste, a richness of imagination, a turn of extravagance, a certain daring and confidence. Had his heredity been left to the father alone, he would have developed into a mere brute, fighting for the love of inflicting pain, his ambitions confined to physical

supremacy alone. As it was, the combination had made of him a brute more dangerous by the addition of intelligence. In spite of gentle surroundings, he had persistently ran away to play in a rough and tumble neighbourhood, where he had been the terror of boys a head taller than himself, and had established an unquestioned tyranny among them. He had a passion at that time for killing cats, and a devilish ingenuity in devising new modes of torture for them, saturating them with gasoline and burning them alive, and other such ghastly amusements. The cruelty of this he had from the father, the ingenuity from the mother. In a fleeting introspection, a review which could have occupied but a few seconds of time, he saw back through the years of his passion, for every year had been a passion of supremacy, as if the cinematograph of his life had flashed swiftly before him, pausing for illumination at certain points which had marked the attainment of hard-won goals.

The days of his schooling, when the mother in him had made him crave knowledge in spite of the physical instincts which drove him out doors. He accomplished both. He went at his lessons viciously, perhaps because they were something which had a tendency to baffle him, and he had made no braver fights in life than on those lonely nights when, angry and determined, he had grappled with his books and conquered them. He had won football honours at the same time. It was said that half the victories of his team came through the fear of Allison on the opposing elevens. He had the reputation of being a demon on the gridiron. His eyes became slightly bloodshot in every contest, and he went into every battle with a smile on his lips which was more like a snarl. His rise to football supremacy

was well remembered all through life by a dozen cripples. He had been extremely fond of football, even after one of his strongest opponents had been carried from the field with a broken neck.

Then business. A different sort of cruelty entered there. He had a method of advancement which was far more effective than adroitness. With the same vicious fever of achievement which had marked the conquering of his books, he had made himself flawlessly efficient, and had contrasted himself deliberately with whatever weakness he could find in his superiors. On the day when the superintendent drank, Allison took especial pains to create an emergency, a break-down in the power plant, and showed himself side by side with the temporarily stupid superintendent, clear-eyed, firm-jawed, glowing cheeked, ready to grapple with his own emergency. He became superintendent. Trickery, now. A block of stock here, a block of stock there, a combination of small holdings by which an unsuspected group of outsiders swept in with control of that first little street car company. Allison's was the smallest block of shares in that combination, infinitesimal as compared with the total capitalisation of the company, the investment of his small savings combined with all the borrowing he could manage. Yet, since he had organised the rebellion, he was left in its control by the same personal dominance with which he had brought together the warring elements. Less than two years after his accession to management, he had frozen out the associates who had put him in power. They none of them knew how it was done, but they did know that he had taken advantage of every tricky opportunity his position gave him, and they were bitter about it. He laughed at them, and he thrashed the man who

complained loudest, a man who had lost every cent of his money through Allison's manipulations. Well, that was the way of business. The old rule of conquest that might makes right had only gone out of favour as applied to physical oppression. In everything else, it still prevailed; and Allison was its chief exponent.

The years of manhood. The panorama was a swiftly moving one now. Combinations and consolidations had followed closely one upon the other; brilliant and bewildering shiftings of the pieces on the chess board of his particular business. Other players had become confused in all these kaleidoscopic changes, some of which had seemed meaningless; but not Allison. Every shift left him in a position of more ruthless advantage, even in those moves which were intended only to create confusion; and he pushed steadily forward towards the one mark he had set; that there should eventually be none other in the field than himself! It was because he never flagged that he could do this. At no summit had he ever paused for gratification over the extent of his climb, for a backward glance over his fiercely contended pathway, for refreshment, for breath; but, with that exhaustless physical vitality inherited from his father and mental vitality inherited from his mother, he had kept his pace forward, plunging onward, from summit to still higher summit, and never asking that there might be one highest peak to which he could attain, and rest! True, sometimes he had thought, on the upward way, that at the summit he might pause, but had that summit been the highest, with none other luring him in the distant sky, he would have been disappointed.

So it was that he had come this far, and the roadway to his present height was marked by the cripples he had

left behind him, without compunction, without mercy, without compassion. Bankrupts strewed his way, broken men of purpose higher than his own, useful factors in the progress of human life, builders and creators who had advanced the interest of the commonwealth, but who had been more brilliant in construction than they had been in reaping the rewards of their building. It was for Allison to do this. It had been his specialty; the reaping of rewards. It had been his faculty to permit others to build, to encourage them in it, and then, when the building was done, to wrest it away from the builders. That marked him as the greatest commercial genius of his time; and he had much applause for it.

Women. Yes, there had been women, creatures of a common mould with whom he had amused himself, had taken them in their freshness, and broken them, and thrown them away; this in his earlier years. But in his maturity, he had bent all his strength to a greater passion; the acquirement of all those other things which men had wanted and held most dear, among them acquisition, and power, and success. Perhaps it had been bad for him, this concentration, for now it left him, at the height of his maturity, with mistaken fancies, with long pent fires, with disproportionate desires. Bringing to these, he had the tremendously abnormal moral effect of never having been thwarted in a thing upon which he had set his mind, and of believing, by past accomplishment, that anything upon which he had set his wish must be his, or else every victory he had ever gained would be swept aside and made of no value. He must accomplish, or die!

He was without God, this man; he had nothing within him which conceded, for a moment, a greater power

than his own. In all his mental imagery, which was rich enough in material things, there was no conception of a Deity, or of a need for one. To what should he pray, and for what, when he had himself to rely upon? Worship was an idealistic diversion, a poetic illusion, the refuge of the weak, who excused their lack of strength by ascribing it to a mysterious something beyond the control of any man. He tolerated the popular notion that there must be a God, as he tolerated codes of social ethics; the conventions which laid down, for instance, what a gentleman might or might not do, externally, and still remain a gentleman. In the meantime, if a man-made law came between him and the accomplishment of his ends, he broke it, without a trace of thought that he might be wrong. Laws were the mutual safeguard of the weak, to protect themselves against the encroachment of the strong; and it was in the equally natural province of the strong to break down those safeguards. In the same way he disregarded moral laws. They, too, were for the upholding of the weak, and the mere fact that they existed was proof enough that they were an acknowledgment of the right of the strong to break them.

There is a mistake here. It lies in the statement that Allison recognised no God. He did. Allison. Not Allison, the man, but the unconquerable will of Allison, a will which was a divinity in itself. He believed in it, centred on it all his faith, poured out to it all the fervidness of his heart, of his mind, of his spirit, of his body. He worshipped it!

So it was that he came to the consideration of the one thing which had attempted to deny itself to him. Gail! It seemed monstrous to him that she had set

herself against him. It was incredible that she should have a will, which, if she persisted, should prove superior to his own. Why, he had set his mind upon her from the first! The time had suddenly arrived when he was ripe for her, and she had come. He had not even given a thought to the many suitors who had dangled about her. She was for none of them. She was for him, and he had waited in patience until she was tired of amusing herself, and until he had wrought the big ambition towards which her coming, and her impulse, and the new fire she had kindled in him, had directed him. She had been seriously in earnest in withholding herself from him. She was determined upon it. She believed now, in her soul, that she could keep to that determination. At first he had been amused by it, as a man holds off the angry onslaught of a child; but, in this last interview with her, there had come a moment when he had felt his vast compulsion valueless; and it had angered him.

A flame raged through his veins which fairly shook him with its violence. It was not only the reflex of his determination to have her, but it was the terrific need of her which had grown up in him. Have her? Of course he would have her! If she would not come to him willingly, he would take her! If she could not share in the ecstasy of possession which he had so long anticipated, she need not. She was not to be considered in it any more than he had considered any other adverse factor in the attainment of anything he had desired. He was possessed of a rage now, which centred itself upon one object, and one alone. Gail! She was his new summit, his new peak, the final one where he had planned to rest; but now his angry thought was to

attain it, and spurn it, broken and crumbled, as had been all the other barriers to his will, and press ruthlessly onward into higher skies, he knew not where. It was no time now, to think on that. Gail first!

CHAPTER XXX

THE FLUTTER OF A SHEET OF MUSIC

GAIL, in a pretty little rose-coloured morning robe, with soft frills of lace around her white throat and at her white elbows, sat on the floor of the music room amid a chaos of sheet music. She was humming a gay little song suggested by one of the titles through which she had leafed, and was gradually sorting her music for the yacht party; instrumental pieces here, popular things there, another little pile of old-fashioned glees which the assembled crowd might sing, just here a little stack of her own solos, nearby the rector's favourites, between the two their duets. It was her part in one of the latter she was humming now, missing, as she sang, the strong accompaniment of the Reverend Smith Boyd's mellow voice. She was more peaceful this morning than she had been for many days.

The butler came through the hall, and Gail looked up with a suppressed giggle as she saw him pass the door. She always had an absurd idea that his hinges should be oiled.

"Miss Gail is not at home, sir," she heard the butler say, and Gail paused with a sheet of music suspended in her hand, the whole expression of her face changing. She had only given instructions that one person should receive that invariable message.

"I *beg* your pardon, sir!" was the next observation

Gail heard, in a tone of as near startled remonstrance as was possible to the butler's wooden voice.

There was a sound almost as of a scuffle, and then Allison, with his top coat on his arm and his hat in his hand, strode to the doorway of the music room, followed immediately by the butler, who looked as if his hair had been peeled a little at the edges. Allison had apparently brushed roughly past him, and had disturbed his equanimity for the balance of his life.

Gail was on her feet almost instantaneously with the apparition in the doorway, and she still held the sheet of music which she had been about to deposit on one of the piles. Allison's eyes had a queer effect of being sunken, and there was a strange nervous tension in him. Gail dismissed the butler with a nod.

"You were informed that I am not at home," she said.

"I meant to see you," he replied, with a certain determined insolence in his tone which she could not escape. There was a triumph in it, too, as if his having swept the butler aside were only a part of his imperious intention. "I have some things to say to you to which you must listen."

"You had better say them all then, because this is your last opportunity," she told him, pale with anger, and with a quaver in her voice which she would have given much to suppress.

He cast on her a look which blazed. He had not slept since he had seen her last. He smiled, and the smile was a snarl, displaying his teeth. Something more than anger crept into Gail's pallor.

"I have come to ask you again to marry me, Gail. The matter is too vital to be let pass without the most serious effort of which I am capable. I can not do

without you. I have a need for you which is greater than anything of which you could conceive. I come to you humbly, Gail, to ask you to reconsider your hasty answer of last night. I want you to marry me."

For just a moment his eyes had softened, and Gail felt a slight trace of pity for him; but in the pity itself there was revulsion.

"I can not," she told him.

"You must!" he immediately rejoined. "As I would build up an empire to win you, I would destroy one to win you. You spoke last night of what you called the cruelty and trickery of the building up of my big transportation monopoly. If it is that which stands between us, it shall not do so for a moment longer. Marry me, and I will stop it just where it is. Why, I only built this for you, and if you don't like it, I shall have nothing to do with it." In that he lied, and consciously. He knew that the moment he had made sure of her his ambition to conquer would come uppermost again, and that he would pursue his dream of conquest with even more ardour than before, because he had been refreshed.

"That would make no difference, Mr. Allison," she replied. "I told you, last night, that I would not marry you because I do not, and could not, love you. There does not need to be any other reason." There was in her an inexplicable tension, a reflex of his own, but, though her face was still pale, she stood very calmly before him.

The savageness which was in him, held too long in leash, sprang into his face, his eyes, his lips, the set of his jaws. He advanced a step towards her. His hands contracted.

"I shall not again ask you to love me," he harshly

stated; "but you must marry me. I have made up my mind to that."

"Impossible!" Angry now and contemptuous.

"I'll make you! There is no resource I will not use. I'll bankrupt your family. I'll wipe it off the earth."

Gail's nails were pressing into her palms. She felt that her lips were cold. Her eyes were widening, as the horror of him began to grow on her. He was glaring at her now, and there was no attempt to conceal the savage cruelty on his face.

"I'll compromise you," he went on. "I'll connect your name with mine in such a way that marriage with me will be your only resource. I'll be an influence you can't escape. There will not be a step you can take in which you will not feel that I am the master of it. Marry you? I'll have you if it takes ten years! I'll have no other end in life. I'll put into that one purpose all the strength, and all the will that I have put into the accomplishment of everything which I have done; and the longer you delay me the sooner I'll break you when I do get you."

Out of her very weakness had come strength; out of her overwhelming humiliation had come pride, and though the blood had left her face waxen and cold, something within her discovered a will which was as strong in resistance as his was in attack. She knew it, and trembled in the knowledge of it.

"You can't make me marry you," she said, with infinite scorn and contempt.

He clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. Into his eyes there sprang a blaze which she had never before seen, but dimly, in the eyes of any man; but she needed no experience to tell her its despicable meaning. His lips, which had been snarling, suddenly took a down-

ward twitch, and were half parted. His nostrils were distended, and the blood, flooding into his face, empurpled it.

"Then I'll have you anyhow!" he hoarsely told her, and, his arms tensed and his head slightly lowered forward, he made as if to advance toward her. He saw in her frightened eyes that she would scream, but he did not know that at that moment she could not. Her heart seemed to have lost its action, and she stood, trembling, faint, in the midst of her strewn music, with the sensation that the room was turning dark.

The house was very quiet. Mrs. Sargent and Mrs. Davies were upstairs. The servants were all in the rear of the house, or below, or in the upper rooms, at their morning work. He turned swiftly and closed the door of the music room, then he whirled again towards her, with ferocity in his eyes. He came slowly, every movement of him alive with ponderous strength. He was a maniac. He was insane. He was frenzied by one mad thought which had swept out of his universe every other consideration, and the glut to kill was no more fearful than the purpose which possessed him now.

Gail, standing slight, fragile, her brown eyes staring, her brown hair dishevelled about her white brow, felt every atom of strength leaving her, devoured in the overwhelming might of this monstrous creature. The sheet of music, which she had been holding all this time, dropped from her nerveless fingers and fluttered to the floor!

That noise, slight as it was, served to arrest the progress of the man for just an instant. He was in no frame to reason, but some instinct urged him to speed. He crouched slightly, as a wild beast might. But the

flutter of that sheet of music had done more for Gail than it had for him. It had loosed the paralysis which had held her, had broken the fascination of horror with which she had been spellbound. Just behind her was a low French window which led to a small side balcony. With one bound she burst this open, she did not know how, and had leaped over the light balcony rail, and ran across the lawn to the rectory gate, up the steps and into the side door, and into the study, where the Reverend Smith Boyd sat toiling over a sermon.

CHAPTER XXXI

GAIL BREAKS A PROMISE

THE *Whitecap* would have been under way except for the delay of the gay little Mrs. Babbitt and her admiring husband, who sent word that they could not arrive until after dinner, so the yacht, long and low and slender and glistening white, lay in the middle of the Hudson River, while her guests, bundled warmly against the crisp breeze, gathered in the forward shelter deck and watched the beginnings of the early sunset.

"I like Doctor Boyd in his yachting cap," commented Lucile, as that young man joined them, with a happy mother on his arm.

"It takes away that deadly clerical effect," laughed Arly. "His long coat makes him look like the captain, and he's ever so much more handsome."

"I don't mind being the topic of discussion so long as I'm present," commented the Reverend Smith Boyd, glancing around the group as if in search of some one.

"It rather restricts the conversation," Mrs. Helen Davies observed, at the same time watching, with a smile, the tableau of her sister Grace and Jim Sargent. Gail and herself had taken Grace out shopping, and had forced on her sedate taste a neat and "fetching" yachting costume, from flowing veiled cap to white shoes, which had dropped about twenty years from her usual

appearance, and had brought a renewed enthusiasm to the eyes of her husband.

The cherub-cheeked Marion Kenneth glanced wistfully over at the rail where Dick Rodley, vieing with the sunset in splendour, stood chatting with easy Ted Teasdale and the stiff Gerald Fosland.

"Where's Gail?" demanded the cherub-cheeked one.

"It's time that young lady was up on deck," decided Arly, and rose.

"She's probably taking advantage of the opportunity to dress for dinner," surmised Mrs. Davies. "In fact, I think it's a good idea for all of us," but the sunset was too potent to leave for a few moments, and she sat still.

Where indeed was Gail? In her beautiful little curly maple stateroom, sitting on the edge of a beautiful little curly maple bed, and digging two small fists into the maple-brown coverlet. The pallor of the morning had not yet left her face, and there were circles around the brown eyes which gave them a wan pathos; there was a crease of pain and worry, too, in the white brow.

Gail had come to the greatest crisis in her life. To begin with, Allison. She would not permit herself to dwell on the most horrible part of her experience with him. That she put out of her mind, as best she could, with a shudder. She hoped, in the time to come, to be free of the picture of him as he advanced slowly towards her in the music room, with that frenzied glare in his eyes and that terrifying evil look upon his face. She hoped, in the time to come, to be free of that awful fear which seemed to have gripped her heart with a clutch that had left deep imprints upon it, but, just now, she let the picture and the fear remain before her

eyes and in her heart, and centred upon her grave responsibilities.

So far she had told no one of what had occurred that morning. When she had rushed into the rector's study he had sprung up, and, seeing the fright in her face and that she was tottering and ready to fall, he had caught her in his strong arms, and she had clung trustfully to him, half faint, until wild sobs had come to her relief. Even in her incoherence, however, even in her wild disorder of emotion, she realised that there was danger, not only to her but to every one she loved, in the man from whom she had run away; and she could not tell the young rector any more than that she had been frightened. Had she so much as mentioned the name of Allison, she instinctively knew that the Reverend Smith Boyd, in whom there was some trace of impetuosity, might certainly have forgotten his cloth and become mere man, and have strode straight across to the house before Allison could have collected his dazed wits; and she did not dare add that encounter to her list of woes. It was strange how instinctively she had headed for the Reverend Smith Boyd's study; strange then, but not now. In that moment of flying straight to the protection of his arms, she knew something about herself, and about the Reverend Smith Boyd, too. She knew now why she had refused Howard Clemmens, and Willis Cunningham, and Houston Van Ploon, and Dick Rodley; poor Dick! and Allison, and all the others. She frankly and complacently admitted to herself that she loved the Reverend Smith Boyd, but she put that additional worry into the background. It could be fought out later. She would have been very happy about it if she had had time, although

she could see no end to that situation but unhappiness.

These threats of Allison's. How far could he go with them, how far could he make them true? All the way. She had a sickening sense that there was no idleness in his threats. He had both the will and the power to carry them out. He would bankrupt her family; he would employ slander against her, from which the innocent have less defence than the guilty; he would set himself viciously to wreck her happiness at every turn. The long arm of his vindictiveness would follow her to her home, and set a barrier of scandalous report even between her and her friends.

But let her first take up the case of her Uncle Jim. She had not dared go with her news to hot-tempered Jim Sargent. His first impulse would have been one of violence, and she could not see that a murder on her soul, and her Uncle Jim in jail as a murderer, and her name figuring large, with her photograph in the pages of the free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan press, would help any one in the present dilemma. Yet even a warning, to her Uncle Jim, of impending financial danger might bring about this very same result, for he had a trick of turning suddenly from the kind and indulgent and tremendously admiring uncle, into a stern parent, and firing one imperative question after another at her, in the very image and likeness of her own father; and that was an authoritative process which she knew she could not resist. Yet Uncle Jim must be protected! How? It was easy enough to say that he must be, and yet could he be? Could he even protect himself? She shook her head as she gazed, with unseeing eyes, out of the daintily curtained port hole upon the river, with its swarm of bustling small craft.

Where to turn for advice, or even to have a sharer in the burden which she felt must surely crush her. There was no one. It was a burden she must bear alone, unless she could devise some plan of effective action, and the sense of how far she had been responsible for this condition of affairs was one which oppressed her, and humbled her, and deepened the circles about her woe-smitten eyes.

She had been guilty. In a rush of remorse and repentance, she overblamed herself. She did not allow, in her severe self-injustice, for the natural instincts which had led her into a full and free commingling with all this new circle; for, as Arly later put it for her by way of comfort, how was she to know if she did not find out. Now, however, she allowed herself no grain of comfort, or sympathy, or relief, from the stern self-arraignment through which she put herself. She had been wicked, she told herself. Had she delved deeply enough into her own heart, and acknowledged what she saw there, and had she abided by that knowledge, she could have spared her many suitors a part of the pain and humiliation she had caused them by her refusal. She had not been surprised by any of them. With the infliction of but very slight pain, she could have stopped them long before they came to the point of proposal, she saw that now. Why had she not done so? Pride! That was the answer. The pleasure of being so eagerly sought, the actually spoken evidence of her popularity, and the flattery of having aroused in all these big men emotions so strong that they took the sincere form of the offering of a lifetime of devotion. And she, who had prated to herself so seriously of marriage, had held it as so sacred a thing, she had so toyed with it, and had toyed, too, with that instinct in these good men!

In the light of her experience with Allison, she began to distrust her own sincerity, and for some minutes she floundered in that Slough of Despond.

But no, out of that misery she was able to emerge clear of soul. Her worst fault had been folly. An instinctive groping for that other part of her, which nature had set somewhere, unlabelled, to make of the twain a complete and perfect human entity, had led her into all her entanglements, even with Allison. And again the darkness deepened around her troubled eyes.

After all, had she but known it, she had a greater fault than folly. Inexperience. Her charm was another, her youth, her beauty, her virility — and her sympathy! These were her true faults, and the ones for which every attractive girl must suffer. There is no escape. It is the great law of compensation. Nature bestows no gift of value for which she does not exact a corresponding price.

Gail took her little fists from their pressure into the brown coverlet, and held her temples between the fingertips of either hand; and the brown hair, springing into wayward ringlets from the salt-breeze which blew in at the half opened window, rippled down over her slender hands, as if to soothe and comfort them. She had been wasting her time in introspection and self-analysis when there was need for decisive action! Fortunately she had a respite until Monday morning. In the past few days of huge commercial movements which so vitally interested her, she had become acquainted with business methods, to a certain extent, and she knew that nothing could be done on Saturday afternoon or Sunday; therefore her Uncle Jim was safe for two nights and a day. Then Allison would deny the connection of her Uncle Jim's road with the A.-P., and the beginning of the de-

struction of the Sargent family would be thoroughly accomplished! She had been given a thorough grasp of how easily that could be done. What could she do in two nights and a day? It was past her ingenuity to conceive. She must have help!

But from whom could she receive it? Tod Boyd? The same reason which made her think of him first made her swiftly place him last. Her Uncle Jim? Too hot-headed. Her Aunt Grace? Too inexperienced. Her Aunt Helen? Too conventional. Lucile, Ted, Dick? She laughed. Arly?

There was a knock on her door, and Arly herself appeared.

"Selfish," chided Arly. "We're all wanting you."

"That's comforting," smiled Gail. "I have just been being all alone in the world, on the most absolutely deserted island of which you can conceive. Arly, sit down. I want to tell you something."

The black hair and the brown hair cuddled close together, while Gail, her tongue once loosened, poured out in a torrent all the pent-up misery which had been accumulating within her for the past tempestuous weeks; and Arly, her eyes glistening with the excitement of it all, kept her exclamations of surprise and fright and indignation and horror, and everything else, strictly to such low monosyllables as would not impede the gasping narration.

"I'd like to kill him!" said Arly, in a low voice of startling intensity, and jumping to her feet she paced up and down the confines of the little stateroom. Among all the other surprises of recent events, there was none more striking than this vast change in the usually cool and sarcastic Arly, who had not, until her return from Gail's home, permitted herself an emotion in two

years. She came back to the bed with a sudden swift knowledge that Gail had been dry-eyed all through this recital, though her lips were quivering. She should have cried. Instead she was sitting straight up, staring at Arly with patient inquiry. She had told all her dilemma, and all her grief, and all her fear; and now she was waiting.

"The only way in which that person can be prevented from attacking your Uncle Jim, which would be his first step, is to attack him before he can do anything," said Arly, pacing up and down, her fingers clasped behind her slender back, her black brows knotted, her graceful head bent toward the floor.

"He is too powerful," protested Gail.

"That makes him weak," returned Arly quickly. "In every great power there is one point of great weakness. Tell me again about this tremendously big world monopoly."

Patiently, and searching her memory for details, Gail recited over again all which Allison had told her about his wonderful plan of empire; and even now, angry and humiliated and terror stricken as she was, Gail could not repress a feeling of admiration for the bigness of it. It was that which had impressed her in the beginning.

"It's wonderful," commented Arly, catching a trace of that spirit of the exultation which hangs upon the unfolding of fairyland; and she began to pace the floor again. "Why, Gail, it is the most colossal piece of thievery the world has ever known!" And she walked in silence for a time. "That is the thing upon which we can attack him. We are going to stop it."

Gail rose, too.

"How?" she asked. "Arly, we couldn't, just we two girls!"

"Why not?" demanded Arly, stopping in front of her. "Any plan like that must be so full of criminal crookedness that exposure alone is enough to put an end to it."

"Exposure," faltered Gail, and struggled automatically with a life-long principle. "It was told to me in confidence."

Arly looked at her in astonishment.

"I could shake you," she declared, and instead put her arm around Gail. "Did that person betray no confidence when he came to your uncle's house this morning! Moreover, he told you this merely to overawe you with the glitter of what he had done. He made that take the place of love! Confidence! I'll never do anything with so much pleasure in my life as to betray yours right now! If you don't expose that person, I will! If there's any way we can damage him, I intend to see that it is done; and if there's any way after that to damage him again and again, I want to do it!"

For the first time in that miserable day, Gail felt a thrill of hope, and Arly, at that moment, had, to her, the aspect of a colossal figure, an angel of brightness in the night of her despair! She felt that she could afford to sob now, and she did it.

"Do you suppose that would save Uncle Jim?" she asked, when they had both finished a highly comforting time together.

"It will save everybody," declared Arly.

"I hope so," pondered Gail. "But we can't do it ourselves, Arly. Whom shall we get to help us?"

The smile on Arly's face was a positive illumination for a moment, and then she laughed.

"Gerald," she replied. "You don't know what a dear he is!" and she rang for a cabin boy.

CHAPTER XXXII

GERALD FOSLAND MAKES A SPEECH

GERALD FOSLAND, known to be so formal that he had once dressed to answer an emergency call from a friend at the hospital, because the message came in at six o'clock, surprised his guests by appearing before them, in the salon just before dinner, in his driving coat and with his motor cap in his hand.

"Sorry," he informed them, with his stiff bow, "but an errand of such importance that it can not be delayed, causes Mrs. Fosland and myself to return to the city immediately for an hour or so. I am sincerely apologetic, and I trust that you will have a jolly dinner."

"Is Gail going with you?" inquired the alert Mrs. Helen Davies, observing Gail in the gangway adjusting her furs.

"She has to chaperon me, while Gerald is busy," Arly glibly explained. "Onery, Orey, Ickery, Ann, Filison, Foloson, Nicholas, John; Queevy, Quavy, English Navy, Stigalum, Stagalum, Buck. You're it, Aunt Grace," counted out Arly. "You and Uncle Jim have to be hosts. Good-bye!" and she sailed out to the deck, followed by the still troubled Gail, who managed to accomplish the laughing adieus for which Arly had set the precedence.

A swift ride in the launch, in the cool night air, to

the landing; a brisk walk to the street, and, since no one had expected to come ashore until Monday, a search for a taxi; then Gerald, chatting with correct pleasantness through his submerged preoccupation, having seen the ladies safe under shelter, even if it were but the roof of a night hawk taxi, stopped at the first saloon, a queer place, of a sodden type which he had never before seen and would never see again. There he phoned half a dozen messages. There were four eager young men waiting in the reception room of the Fosland house, when Gerald's party arrived, and three more followed them up the steps.

Gerald aided in divesting the ladies of their wraps, and slipped his own big top coat into the hands of William, and saw to his tie and the set of his waistcoat and the smoothness of his hair, before he stalked into the reception parlour and bowed stiffly.

"Gentlemen," he observed, giving his moustache one last smoothing, "first of all, have you brought with you the written guarantees which I required from your respective chiefs, that, in whatsoever comes from the information I am about to give you, the names of your informants shall, under no circumstances, appear in print?"

One luckless young man, a fat-cheeked one, with a pucker in the corner of his lips where his cigar should have been, was unable to produce the necessary document, and he was under a scrutiny too close to give him a chance to write it.

"Sorry," announced Gerald, with polite contrition. "As this is a very strict condition, I must ask you to leave the room while I address the remaining gentlemen."

The remaining gentlemen, of whom there were now

eleven, grinned appreciatively. Hickey would have been the best newspaper man in New York if he were not such a careless slob. He was so good that he was the only man from the *Planet*. The others had sent two, and three; for Gerald's message, while very simple, had been most effective. He had merely announced that he was prepared to provide them with an international sensation, involving some hundreds of billions of dollars — and he had given his right name!

The unfortunate Hickey made a violent pretence of search through all his pockets.

"I must have lost it," he piteously declared. "Won't you take my written word that you won't be mentioned?" and he looked up at the splendidly erect Gerald with that honest appeal in his eyes which had deceived so many.

"Sorry," announced Gerald; "but it wouldn't be sportsmanlike, since it would be quite unfair to these other gentlemen."

"Hold the stuff 'til I telephone," begged Hickey. "Say, if I get that written guarantee up here in fifteen minutes, will it do?"

Gerald looked him speculatively in the eye.

"If you telephone, and can then assure me, on your word of honour, that the document I require shall be in the house before you leave, I shall permit you to remain," he decreed; and Hickey looked him quite soberly in the eye for half a minute.

"I'll have it here all right," he decided, and sprang for the telephone, and came back in three minutes with his word of honour. They could hear him, from the library, yelling, from the time he gave the number until he hung up the receiver, and if there was ever urgency in a man's voice, it was in the voice of Hickey.

Gerald Fosland took a commanding position in the corner of the room, where he could see the countenances of each of the eager young gentlemen present. He stood behind a chair, with his hands on the back of it, in his favourite position for responding to a toast.

"Gentlemen; Edward E. Allison (*Twelve young gentlemen who had been leaning forward with strained interest, and their mouths half open to help them hear, suddenly jerked bolt upright. The little squib over under the statue of Diana, dropped his leadpencil, and came up with a purple face. Hickey, with a notebook two inches wide in one hand, jabbed down a scratch to represent Allison*) is about to complete a transportation system encircling the globe. (*The little squib on the end choked on his tongue. Hickey made a ring on his note pad, to represent the globe, and while he waited for the sensation to subside, put a buckle on it.*) The acquisition of the foreign railroads will be made possible only by a war, which is already arranged. (*The little squib got writer's cramp. Hickey waited for details. The hollow-cheeked reporter grabbed for a cigarette, but with no intention of lighting it.*) The war, which will be between Germany and France, will begin within a month. France, unable to raise a war fund otherwise, will sell her railroads. The Russian line is already being taken from its present managers, and will be turned over to Allison's world syndicate within a week. The important steamship lines will become involved in financial difficulties, which have already been set afoot in England. Following these events will come a successful rebellion in India, and the independence of all the British colonies. (*The little squib laid down his pencil, and sat in open-mouthed despair. He was three sentences behind, and knew that he would be com-*

pelled to trust his memory and his imagination, and neither were equal to this task. Hickey had seven serene jabs on his notebook, and was peacefully framing his introductory paragraph. A seraphic smile was on his thick lips, and his softened eyes were gazing fondly into the fields of rich fancy. The hollow-cheeked young man had cocked his cigarette perpendicularly, and he was writing a few words with artistic precision. The red-headed reporter was tearing off page after page of his notebook and stuffing them loosely in his pocket. One of the boys, a thick-breasted one with large hands, was making microscopic notes on the back of an envelope, and had plenty of room to spare.) You will probably require some tangible evidence that these large plans are on the way to fulfilment. I call your attention to the fact that, last week, the Russian Duomo began a violent agitation over the removal of Olaf Petrovy, who was the controller of the entire Russian railroad system. Day before yesterday, Petrovy was unfortunately assassinated, and the agitation in the Duomo subsided. *(Hickey only nodded. His eyes glowed with the light of a poet. The little squib sighed dejectedly.)* This morning I read that France is greatly incensed over a diplomatic breach in the German war office; and it is commented that the breach is one which can not possibly be healed. Kindly take note of the following facts. From the first to the eighth of this month, Baron von Slachten, who is directly responsible for Germany's foreign relations, was seen in this city at the Fencing Club, under the incognito of Henry Brokaw. Chevalier Duchambeau, director of the combined banking interests of France, was here in that same week, and was seen at the Montparnasse Cercle. He bore the name of Andree Tirez. The

Grand Duke Jan, of Russia, was here as Ivan Strolesky. James Wellington Hodge, the master of the banking system of practically all the world, outside the United States, was here as E. E. Chalmers. Prince Nito of Japan, Yu-Hip-Lun of China and Count Cassioni of Rome, were here at the same time; and they all called on Edward E. Allison. (*Furious writing on the part of all the young gentlemen except the little squib and Hickey; the former in an acute paralysis of body and mind and soul, and Hickey in an acute ecstasy. He had symbols down for all the foreign gentlemen named, a pretzel for the Baron, and had the local records of Ivan Strolesky and Baron von Slachten up a tree. He had seen them both, and interviewed the former.*) Furthermore, gentlemen, I will give you now the names of the eight financiers, who, with Edward E. Allison, are interested in the formation of the International Transportation Company, which proposes to control the commerce of the world. These gentlemen are Joseph G. Clark (*the little squib jumped up and sat down. Hickey produced a long, low whistle of unbounded joy. The hollow-faced one jerked the useless cigarette from his mouth and threw it in the fireplace. The red-headed reporter laughed hysterically, though he never stopped writing. Every young gentleman there made one or another sharp physical movement expressive of his astonishment and delight*), Eldridge Babbitt (*more sensation*), W. T. Chisholm (*Hickey wrote the rest of the list*), Richard Haverman, Arthur Grandin, Robert E. Taylor, A. L. Vance. I would suggest that, if you disturb these gentlemen in the manner which I have understood you to be quite capable of doing, you might secure from some one of them a trace of corroboration of the things I have said. This is all." He paused,

and bowed stiffly. "Gentlemen, I wish to add one word. I thank you for your kind attention, and I desire to say that, while I have violated to-night several of the rules which I had believed that I would always hold unbroken, I have done so in the interest of a justice which is greater than all other considerations. Gentlemen, good-night."

"Have you a good photograph handy?" asked the squib, awakening from his trance.

Nine young gentlemen put the squib right about that photograph. Hickey was lost in the fields of Elysian phantasy, and the red-headed reporter was still writing and stuffing loose pages in his pocket, and the one with the beard was making a surreptitious sketch of Gerald Fosland, to use on the first plausible occasion. He had in mind a special article on wealthy clubmen at home.

"Company incorporated?" inquired Hickey, who was the most practical poet of his time.

"I should consider that a pertinent question," granted Gerald. "Gentlemen, you will pardon me for a moment," and he bowed himself from the room.

He had meant to ask that one simple question and return, but, in Arlene's blue room, where sat two young women in a high state of quiver, he had to make his speech all over again, verbatim, and detail each interruption, and describe how they received the news, and answer, several times, the variously couched question, if he really thought their names would not be mentioned. It was fifteen minutes before he returned, and he found the twelve young gentlemen suffering with an intolerable itch to be gone! Five of the young men were in the library, quarrelling, in decently low voices, over the use of phone. The imperturbable Hickey,

however, had it, and he held on, handing in a story, embellished and coloured and frilled and be-ribboned as he went, which would make the cylinders on the presses curl up.

"I am sorry to advise you, gentlemen, that I am unable to tell you if the International Transportation Company is, or is about to be, incorporated," reported Gerald gravely, and he signalled to William to open the front door.

The air being too cold, however, he had it closed presently, for now he was the centre of an interrogatory circle from every degree of which came questions so sharply pointed that they seemed to flash as they darted towards him. Gerald Fosland listened to this babble of conversation with a courtesy beautiful to behold, but at the first good pause, he advised them that he had given them all the information at his command, and once more caused the door to be opened; whereupon the eager young gentlemen, with the exception of the squib, who was on his knees under a couch looking for a lost subway ticket, shook hands cordially and admiringly with the host of the evening, and bulged out into the night.

As the rapt and enchanted Hickey passed out of the door, a grip like a pair of ice tongs caught him by the arm, and drew him gently but firmly back.

"Sorry," observed Gerald; "but you don't go."

"Hasn't that damn boy got here yet?" demanded Hickey, in an immediate mood for assassination. He was a large young man, and defective messenger boys were the bane of his existence.

"William says not," replied Gerald.

"For the love of Mike, let me go!" pleaded Hickey. "This stuff has to be handled while it's still sizzling!"

It's the biggest story of the century! That boy'll be here any minute."

"Sorry," regretfully observed Gerald; "but I shall be compelled to detain you until he arrives."

"Can't do it!" returned the desperate Hickey. "I have to go!" and he made a dash for the door.

Once more the ice tongs clutched him by the shoulder and sank into the flesh.

"If you try that again, young man, I shall be compelled to thrash you," stated the host, again mildly.

Hickey looked at him, very thoroughly. Gerald was a slim waisted gentleman, but he had broad shoulders and a depressingly calm eye, and he probably exercised twenty minutes every morning by an open window, after his cold plunge, and took a horseback ride, and walked a lot, and played polo, and a few other effete things like that. Hickey sat down and waited, and, though the night was cold, he mopped his brow until the messenger came!

CHAPTER XXXIII

CHICKEN, OR STEAK?

ON the outbreak of a bygone rudeness between the United States and Spain, one free and entirely uncurbed metropolitan paper, unable to adequately express its violent emotions on the subject, utilised its whole front page with the one word "War!" printed in red ink, and since this edition was jumped off the press as fast as that word could be matrixed and cast, there was not another line anywhere in the paper about the subject which was so prominently indexed, and the read-overs about the latest briberies and murders and scandals had no beginnings at all. But that was good journalism. The public had been expecting war for some days. They knew what it was all about, and here it was. They bought up that edition with avidity, and read the one word of news, which they had seen from afar, and threw down the paper, satisfied.

Now, however, the free and entirely uncurbed, having risen most gloriously in the past to every emergency, no matter how great, positively floundered in the very wealth of its opportunities. To begin with, the free and entirely uncurbed, usually a unit in what constituted the news of the day, found itself ignominiously scattered, fozzled in its judgment, inadequate in its expression of anything; and one brilliant head writer, after trying in vain to combine the diverse elements of this uncomfortably huge sensation, landed on the sin-

gle word "Yow!" and went out, in a daze, for a drink. One paper landed on the Franco-German War as the leading thrill in this overly rich combination of news, one took up the greed of Allison, one featured the world monopoly, one the assured downfall of England, and one, that represented by the squib, the general absorption of everything by the cereal trust.

Saturday night, however, saw no late extras. The "story" was too big to touch without something more tangible than the word of even so substantial a man as Gerald Fosland; and long before any of the twelve eager young gentlemen had reached the office, the scout brigade, hundreds strong, were sniffing over every trail and yelping over every scent.

They traced the visiting diplomats from the time they had stepped down their respective gangplanks to the time they walked up them again. They besieged and bombarded and beleaguered the eight members of the International Transportation Company, or as many of them as they could locate, and they even found their way out to Gerald Fosland's yacht, in mad pursuit of Eldridge Babbitt. Here, however, they were foiled, for Gerald, ordering the anchor hoist at the first hail, stepped out on the deck from his belated dinner, and informed the gentlemen of the press that the rights of hospitality on his yacht would be held inviolate, whereupon he headed for Sandy Hook. The scout brigade were also unable to locate Joseph G. Clark, the only multi-millionaire in America able to crawl in a hole and pull the hole in after him, Robert E. Taylor, who never permitted anybody but a personal friend to speak to him from dinner time on, and Edward E. Allison, of whom there had been no trace since noon. They might just as well not have found

the others, for neither Chisholm, nor Haverman, nor Grandin, nor Vance, could be induced to make any admissions, be trapped into a yes or no, or grunt in the wrong place. They had grown up with the art of interviewing, and had kept one lap ahead of it, in obedience to nature's first law, which, as every school boy knows, though older people may have forgotten it, is the law of self-preservation.

Until three o'clock in the morning every newspaper office in New York was a scene of violent gloom. Throughout all the city, and into many outside nooks and crannies, were hundreds of human tentacles, burrowing like moles into the sandy soil of news, but unearthing nothing of any value. The world's biggest sensation was in those offices, and they couldn't touch it with a pair of tongs! Nor were libel suits, or any such trivial considerations, in the minds of the astute managers of the free and entirely uncurbed. The deterrent was that the interests involved were so large that one might as well sit on a keg of gunpowder and light it, as to make the slightest of errors. The gentlemen mentioned as the organisers of the International Transportation Company collectively owned about all the money, and all the power, and all the law, in the gloriously independent United States of America; and if they got together on any one subject, such as the squashing of a newspaper, for instance, something calm and impressive was likely to happen. On the other hand, if the interesting story the free and entirely uncurbed had in its possession were true, the squashing would be reversed, and the freeness and entirely uncurbedness would be still more firmly seated than ever, which is the paladium of our national liberties; and Heaven be good to us.

It was a distressing evening. Whole reams of copy, more throbbing than any fiction, more potent than any explosion, more consequential than any war, hung on the "hold" hooks, and grew cold! Whole banks of galleys of the same gorgeous stuff stood on the racks, set and revised, and ready to be plated, and not a line of it could be released!

Towards morning there was an army of newspaper men so worried and distressed, and generally consumed with the mad passion of restraint, that there was scarcely a fingernail left in the profession, and frightened-eyed copy boys hid behind doors. Suddenly a dozen telegraph operators, in as many offices, jumped from their desks, as if they had all been touched at the same instant by a powerful current from their instruments, and shouted varying phrases, a composite of which would be nearest expressed by:

"Let 'er go!"

It had been eight o'clock in the evening in New York when Gerald Fosland had first given out his information, and at that moment it was one A. M. in Berlin. At three A. M., Berlin time, which was ten P. M. in New York, the Baron von Slachten, who had been detained by an unusual stress of diplomatic business, strolled to his favourite café. At three-five, the Baron von Slachten became the most thought about man in his city, but the metropolitan press of Berlin is slightly fettered and more or less curbed, and there are certain formalities to be observed. It is probable, therefore, that the Baron might have gone about his peaceful way for two or three days, had not a fool American, in the advertising branch of one of the New York papers, in an entire ignorance of decent formalities, walked straight

out Unter den Linden, to Baron von Slachten's favourite café, and, picking out the Baron at a table with four bushy-faced friends, made this cheerful remark, in the manner and custom of journalists in his native land:

"Well, Baron, the International Transportation Company has confessed. Could you give me a few words on the subject?"

The Baron, who had been about to drink a stein of beer, set down his half leiter and stared at the young man blankly. His face turned slowly yellow, and he rose.

"Lass bleiben," the Baron ordered the handy persons who were about to remove the cheerful advertising representative and incarcerate him for life, and then the Baron walked stolidly out of the café, and rode home, and wrote for an hour or so, and ate a heavy early breakfast, and returned to his study, and obligingly shot himself.

This was at seven A. M., Berlin time, which was two A. M., in New York; and owing to the nervousness of an old woman servant, the news reached New York at three A. M., and the big wheels began to go around.

Where was Edward E. Allison? There was nothing the free and entirely uncurbed wanted to know so much as that; but the f. and e. u. was doomed to disappointment in that one desire of its heart. Even as he had stumbled down the steps of the Sargent house, Allison was aware of the hideous thing he had done; aware, too, that Jim Sargent was as violent as good-natured men are apt to be. This thought, it must be said in justice to Allison, came last and went away first. It was from himself that he tried to run away, when he shot his runabout up through the Park and into the north country, and, by devious roads, to a place which had come to him as if by inspiration; the Willow Club,

which was only open in the summertime, and employed a feeble old caretaker in the winter. To this haven, bleak and cold as his own numbed soul, Allison drove in mechanical firmness, and ran his machine back into the garage, and closed the doors on it, and walked around to the kitchen, where he found old Peabody smoking a corncob pipe, and laboriously mending a pair of breeches.

"Why, howdy, Mr. Allison," greeted Peabody, rising, and shoving up his spectacles. "It's a treat to see anybody these days. I ain't had a visitor for nigh onto a month. There ain't any provisions in the house, but if you'd like anything I can run over to the village and get it. I got a jug of my own, if you'd like a little snifter. How's things in the city?" and still rambling on with unanswered questions and miscellaneous offers and club grounds information, he pottered to the corner cupboard, and produced his jug, and poured out a glass of whiskey.

"Thanks," said Allison, and drank the liquor mechanically. He was shuddering with the cold, but he had not noticed it until now. He glanced around the room slowly and curiously, as if he had not seen it before. "I think I'll stay out here over night," he told Peabody. "I'll occupy the office. If any one rings the phone, don't answer."

"Yes-sir," replied Peabody. "Tell you what I'll do, Mr. Allison. I'll muffle the bell. I guess I better light a fire in the office."

"Eh? Yes. Oh yes. Yes, you might light a fire."

"Get you a nice chicken maybe."

"Eh? Yes. Oh yes. Yes."

"Chicken or steak? Or maybe some chops."

"Anything you like," and Allison went towards the

office. At the door he turned. "You'll understand, Peabody, that I have come here to be quiet. I wish to be entirely alone, with certain important matters which I must decide. If anybody should happen to drop in, get rid of him. Do not say that I am here or have been here."

"Yes-sir," replied Peabody. "I know how it is that away. I want to be by myself, often. Shall I make up the bed in the east room or the west room? Seems to me the west room is a little pleasanter."

Allison went into the office, and closed the door after him. It was damp and chill in there, but he did not notice it. He sat down in the swivel chair behind the flat top desk, and rested his chin in his hands, and stared out of the window at the bleak and dreary landscape. Just within his range of vision was a lonely little creek, shadowed by a mournful drooping willow which had given the Club its name, and in the wintry breeze it waved its long tendrils against the leaden grey sky. Allison fixed his eyes on that oddly beckoning tree, and strove to think. Old Peabody came pottering in, and with many a clang and clatter builded a fire in the capacious Dutch stove; with a longing glance at Allison, for he was starved with the hunger of talk, he went out again.

At dusk he once more opened the door. Allison had not moved. He still sat with his chin in his hands, looking out at that weirdly waving willow. Old Peabody thought that he must be asleep, until he tiptoed up at the side. Allison's grey eyes, unblinking, were staring straight ahead, with no expression in them. It was as if they had turned to glass.

"Excuse me, Mr. Allison. Chicken or steak? I

got 'em both, one for supper and one for breakfast."

Allison turned slowly, part way towards Peabody; not entirely.

"Chicken or steak?" repeated Peabody.

"Eh? Yes. Oh yes. Yes. The chicken."

The fire had gone out. Peabody rebuilt it. He came in an hour later, and studied the silent man at the desk for a long minute, and then he decided an important question for himself. He brought in Allison's dinner on a tray, and set it on a corner of the desk.

"Shall I spread a cloth?"

"No," returned Allison. The clatter had aroused him for the moment, and Peabody went away with a very just complaint that if he had to be bothered with a visitor on a grey day like this, he'd rather not have such an unsociable cuss.

At eleven Peabody came in again, to see if Allison were not ready to go to bed; but Allison sent him away as soon as he had fixed the fire. The tray was untouched, and out there in the dim moonlight, which peered now and then through the shifting clouds, the long-armed willow beckoned and beckoned.

Morning came, cold and grey and damp as the night had been. Allison had fallen asleep towards the dawn, sitting at his desk with his heavy head on his arms, and not even the clatter of the building of the fire roused him. At seven when Peabody came, Allison raised up with a start at the opening of the door, but before he glanced at Peabody, he looked out of the window at the willow.

"Good-morning," said Peabody with a cheerfulness which sounded oddly in that dim, bare room. "I brought you the paper, and some fresh eggs. There

was a little touch of frost this morning, but it went away about time for sun-up. How will you have your eggs? Fried, I suppose, after the steak. Seems like you don't have much appetite," and he scrutinised the untouched tray with mingled regret and resentment. Since Allison paid no attention to him, he decided on eggs fried after the steak, and started for the door.

Allison had picked up the paper mechanically. It had lain with the top part downwards, but his own picture was in the centre. He turned the paper over, so that he could see the headlines.

"Peabody!" No longer the dead tones of a man in a mental stupor, a man who can not think, but in the sharp tones of a man who can feel.

"Yes-sir." Sharp and crisp, like the snap of a whip. Allison had scared it out of him.

"Don't come in again until I call you."

"Yes-sir." Grieved this time. Darn it, wasn't he doing his best for the man!

So it had come; the time when his will was not God! A God should be omnipotent, impregnable, unassailable, absolute. He was surprised at the calmness with which he took this blow. It was the very bigness of the hurt which left it so little painful. A man with his leg shot off suffers not one-tenth so much as a man who tears his fingernail to the quick. Moreover, there was that other big horror which had left him stupefied and numb. He had not known that in his ruthlessness there was any place for remorse, or for terror of himself at anything he might choose to do. But there was. He entered into no ravings now, no writhings, no outcries. He realised calmly and clearly all he had done, and all which had happened to him in retribution. He saw the downfall of his stupendous scheme of world-

wide conquest. He saw his fortune, to the last penny, swept away, for he had invested all that he could raise on his securities and his business and his prospects, in the preliminary expenses of the International Transportation Company, bearing this portion of the financial burden himself, as part of the plan by which he meant to obtain ultimate control and command of the tremendous consolidation, and become the king among kings, with the whole world in his imperious grasp, a sway larger than that of any potentate who had ever sat upon a throne, larger than the sway of all the monarchs of earth put together, as large terrestrially as the sway of God himself! All these he saw crumbled away, fallen down around him, a wreck so complete that no shred or splinter of it was worth the picking up; saw himself disgraced and discredited, hated and ridiculed throughout the length and breadth and circumference of the very earth he had meant to rule; saw himself discarded by the strong men whom he had inveigled into this futile scheme and saw himself forced into commercial death as wolves rend and devour a crippled member of their pack; last, he saw himself loathed in the one pure breast he had sought to make his own; and that was the deepest hurt of all; for now, in the bright blaze of his own conflagration, he saw that, beneath his grossness, he had loved her, after all, loved her with a love which, if he had shorn it of his dross, might perhaps have won her.

Through all that day he sat at the desk, and when the night-time came again, he walked out of the house, and across the field, and over the tiny foot-bridge, under the willow tree with the still beckoning arms; and the world, his world, the world he had meant to make his own, never saw him again.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

GAIL stood at the rail of the *Whitecap*, gazing out over the dancing blue waves with troubled eyes.

"Penny," said a cheerful voice at her side.

"For my thoughts," she replied, turning to the impossibly handsome Dick Rodley who had strolled up, in his blue jacket and white trousers and other nautical embellishments. "Give me your penny."

He reached in his pockets, but of course, there was no money there. He did, however, find a fountain pen and a card, and he wrote her a note for the amount.

"Now deliver the merchandise," he demanded.

"Well, to begin with, I'm glad that the fog has been driven away, and that the sun is shining, and that so many of my friends are on board the *Whitecap*."

"You're not a conscientious merchant," objected Dick. "You're not giving me all I paid for. No one stands still so long, no matter how charming of figure or becomingly gowned, without a serious thought. I want that thought."

Gail looked up into his big black eyes reflectively. She was tremendously glad that she had such a friend as Dick. He was so agreeable to look at, and he was no problem to her. The most of her friends were.

"The news in the paper," she told him. "It's so big."

Dick looked down at her critically. Her snow-white

yachting costume, with its touches of delicate blue, seemed to make her a part of the blue sea and the blue sky, with their markings of white in foam and cloud, to enhance the delicate pallor of her cheeks, to throw into her brown eyes a trace of violet, to bring into relief, the rich colour of the brown hair which rippled about her face, straying where it could into wanton little ringlets, sometimes gold and sometimes almost red in the sun. She was so new a Gail to Dick that he was puzzled, and worried, too, for he felt, rather than saw, that some trouble possessed this dearest of his friends.

"Yes, it is big news," he admitted; "big enough and startling enough to impress any one very gravely." Then he shook his head at her. "But you mustn't worry about it, Gail. You're not responsible."

Gail turned her eyes from him and looked out over the white-edged waves again.

"It is a tremendous responsibility," she mused, whereupon Dick, as became him, violently broke that thread of thought by taking her arm and drawing her away from the rail, and walking gaily with her up to the forward shelter deck, where, shielded from the crispness of the wind, there sat, around the big table and amid a tangle of Sunday papers, Jim Sargent and the Reverend Smith Boyd, Arly and Gerald Fosland, all four deep in the discussion of the one possible topic of conversation.

"Allison's explosion again," objected Dick, as Gail and he joined the group, and caught the general tenor of the thought. "I suppose the only way to escape that is to jump off the *Whitecap*. Gail's worse than any of you. I find she's responsible for the whole thing."

Arly and Gerald looked up quickly.

"I neither said nor intimated anything of the sort," Gail reprimanded Dick, for the benefit of the Foslands, and she sat down by Arly, whereupon Dick, observing that he was much offended, patted Gail on the shoulder, and disappeared in search of Ted.

"I'd like to hand a vote of thanks to the responsible party," laughed Jim Sargent, to whom the news meant more than Gail appreciated. "With Allison broke, Urbank of the Midcontinent succeeds to control of the A.-P., and Urbank is anxious to incorporate the Towando Valley in the system. He told me so yesterday."

The light which leaped into Gail's eyes, and the trace of colour which flashed into her cheeks, were most comforting to Arly; and they exchanged a smile of great satisfaction. They clutched hands ecstatically under the corner of the table, and wanted to laugh outright. However, it would keep.

"The destruction of Mr. Allison was a feat of which any gentleman's conscience might approve," commented Gerald Fosland, who had spent some time in definitely settling, with himself, the ethics of that question. "The company he proposed to form was a menace to the liberty of the world and the progress of civilisation."

"The destruction didn't go far enough," snapped Jim Sargent. "Clark, Vance, Haverman, Grandin, Babbitt, Taylor, Chisholm; these fellows won't be touched, and they built up their monopolies by the same method Allison proposed; trickery, force, and plain theft!"

"Harsh language, Uncle Jim Sargent, to use toward your respectable fellow-vestrymen," chided Arly, her black eyes dancing.

"Clark and Chisholm?" and Jim Sargent's brows

knotted. "They're not my fellow-vestrymen. Either they go or I do!"

"I would like you to remain," quietly stated the Reverend Smith Boyd. "I hope to achieve several important alterations in the ethics of Market Square Church." He was grave this morning. He had unknowingly been ripening for some time on many questions; and the revelations in this morning's papers had brought him to the point of decision. "I wish to drive the money changers out of the temple," he added, and glanced at Gail with a smile in which there was acknowledgment.

"A remarkably lucrative enterprise, eh Gail?" laughed her Uncle Jim, remembering her criticism on the occasion of her first and only vestry meeting, when she had called their attention to the satire of the stained glass window.

"You will have still the Scribes and Pharisees, Doctor; 'those who stand praying in the public places, so they may be seen of all men,'" and Gail smiled across at him, within her eyes the mischievous twinkle which had been absent for many days.

"I hope to be able to remove the public place," replied the rector, with a gravity which told of something vital beneath the apparent repartee. Mrs. Boyd, strolling past with Aunt Grace Sargent, paused to look at him fondly. "I shall set myself, with such strength as I may have, against the building of the proposed cathedral."

He had said it so quietly that it took the little group a full minute to comprehend. Jim Sargent looked with acute interest at the end of his cigar, and threw it overboard. Arly leaned slowly forward, and, resting her piquant chin on her closed hand, studied the rector earnestly. Gerald stroked his moustache contemplatively,

and looked at the rector with growing admiration. By George, that was a sportsmanlike attitude! He'd have to take the Reverend Smith Boyd down to the Papyrus Club one day. All the trouble flew back into Gail's eyes. It was a stupendous thing the Reverend Smith Boyd was proposing to relinquish! The rectorship of the most wonderful cathedral in the world! Mrs. Boyd looked startled for a moment. She had known of Tod's bright dreams about the new cathedral and the new rectory. He had planned his mother's apartments himself, and the last thing his eyes looked upon at night were the beautifully coloured sketches on his walls.

"Don't be foolish, Boyd," protested Sargent, who had always felt a fatherly responsibility for the young rector. "It's a big ambition and a worthy ambition, to build that cathedral; and because you're offended with certain things the papers have said, about Clark and Chisholm in connection with the church, is no reason you should cut off your nose to spite your face."

"It is not the publication of these things which has determined me," returned the rector thoughtfully. "It has merely hastened my decision. To begin with, I acknowledge now that it was only a vague, artistic dream of mine that such a cathedral, by its very magnificence, would promote worship. That might have been the case when cathedrals were the only magnificent buildings erected, and when every rich and glittering thing was devoted to religion. A golden candlestick then became connected entirely with the service of the Almighty. Now, however, magnificence has no such signification. The splendour of a cathedral must enter into competition with the splendour of a state house, a museum, or a hotel."

"You shouldn't switch that way, Boyd," remon-

strated Sargent, showing his keen disappointment. "When you began to agitate for the cathedral you brought a lot of our members in who hadn't attended services in years. You stirred them up. You got them interested. They'll drop right off."

"I hope not," returned the rector earnestly. "I hope to reach them with a higher ambition, a higher pride, a higher vanity, if you like to put it that way. I wish them to take joy in establishing the most magnificent living conditions for the poor which have ever been built! We have no right to the money which is to be paid us for the Vedder Court property. We have no right to spend it in pomp. It belongs to the poor from whom we have taken it, and to the city which has made us rich by enhancing the value of our ground. I propose to build permanent and sanitary tenements, to house as many poor people as possible, and conduct them without a penny of profit above the cost of repairs and maintenance."

Gail bent upon him beaming eyes, and the delicate flush, which had begun to return to her cheeks, deepened. Was this the sort of tenements he had proposed to re-erect in Vedder Court? Perhaps she had been hasty! The Reverend Smith Boyd in turning slowly from one to the other of the little group, by way of establishing mental communication with them, rested, for a moment, in the beaming eyes of Gail, and smiled at her in affectionate recognition then swept his glance on to his mother, where it lingered.

"You are perfectly correct," stated Gerald Fosland, who, though sitting stiffly upright, had managed nevertheless to dispose one elbow where it touched gently the surface of Arly. "Market Square Church is a much more dignified old place of worship than the ostenta-

tious cathedral would ever be, and your project for spending the money has such strict justice at the bottom of it that it must prevail. But, I say, Doctor Boyd," and he gave his moustache a contemplative tug; "don't you think you should include a small margin of profit for the future extension of your idea?"

"That's glorious, Gerald!" approved Gail; and Arly, laughing, patted his hand.

"You're probably right," considered the rector, studying Fosland with a new interest. "I think we'll have to put you on the vestry."

"I'd be delighted, I'm sure," responded Gerald, in the courteous tone of one accepting an invitation to dinner.

"Do you hear what your son's planning to do?" called Jim Sargent to Mrs. Boyd. He was not quite reconciled. "He proposes to take that wonderful new rectory away from you."

The beautiful Mrs. Boyd merely dimpled.

"I am a trifle astonished," she confessed. "My son has been so extremely eager about it; but if he is relinquishing the dream, it is because he wants something else very much more worth while. I entirely approve of his plan for the new tenements," and she did not understand why they all laughed at her. She did feel, however, that there was affection in the laughter; and she was quite content. Laughing with them, she walked on with Grace Sargent. They had set out to make twenty trips around the deck, for exercise.

"I find that I have been at work on the plans for these new tenements ever since the condemnation," went on the rector. "I would build them in the semi-court style, with light and air in every room; with as little woodwork as possible; with plumbing appliances of

simple and perfect sanitation; with centralised baths under the care of an attendant; with assembly rooms for both social and religious observances and with self contained bureaus of employment, health and police protection — one building to each of six blocks, widening the street for a grass plot, trees, and fountains. The fact that the Market Square Church property is exempt from taxation, saving us over half a million dollars a year, renders us able to provide these advantages at a much lower rental to my Vedder Court people than they can secure quarters anywhere else in the city, and at the same time lay up a small margin of profit for the system."

Gerald Fosland drew forward his chair.

"Do you know," he observed, "I should like very much to become a member of your vestry."

"I'm glad you are interested," returned the rector, and producing a pencil he drew a white advertising space towards him. "This is the plan of tenement I have in mind," and for the next half hour the five of them discussed tenement plans with great enthusiasm.

At the expiration of that time, Ted and Lucile and Dick and Marion came romping up, with the deliberate intention of creating a disturbance; and Gail and the Reverend Smith Boyd, being thrown accidentally to the edge of that whirlpool, walked away for a rest.

"They tell me you're going abroad," observed the rector, looking down at her sadly, as they paused at her favourite rail space.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "Father and mother are coming next week," and she glanced up at the rector from under her curving lashes.

There was a short space of silence. It was almost as if these two were weary.

"We shall miss you very much," he told her, in all sincerity. They were both looking out over the blue waves; he, tall, broad-shouldered, agile of limb; she, straight, lithe, graceful. Mrs. Boyd and Mrs. Sargent passed them admiringly, but went on by with a trace of sadness.

"I'm sorry to leave," Gail replied. "I shall be very anxious to know how you are coming on with your new plan. I'm proud of you for it."

"Thank you," he returned.

They were talking mechanically. In them was an inexpressible sadness. They had come so near, and yet they were so far apart. Moreover, they knew that there was no chance of change. It was a matter of conscience which came between them, and it was a divergence which would widen with the years. And yet they loved. They mutually knew it, and it was because of that love that they must stay apart.

CHAPTER XXXV

A VESTRY MEETING

THERE was a strained atmosphere in the vestry meeting from the first. Every member present felt the tension from the moment old Joseph G. Clark walked in with Chisholm. They did not even nod to the Reverend Smith Boyd, but took their seats solidly in their customary places at the table, Clark, shielding his eyes, as was his wont, against the light which streamed on him from the red robe of the Good Shepherd. The repression was apparent, too, in the Reverend Smith Boyd, who rose to address his vestrymen as soon as the late-comers arrived.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I wish to speak to you as the treasury committee, rather than as vestrymen, for it is in the former capacity which you always attend. I am advised that we have been paid for Vedder Court."

Chisholm, to whom he directed a gaze of inquiry, nodded his head.

"It's in the Majestic," he stated. "I have plans for its investment, which I wish to lay before the committee."

"I shall lay my own before them at the same time," went on the rector. "I wish, however, to preface these plans by the statement that I have, so far as I am concerned, relinquished all thought of building the new cathedral."

Nicholas Van Ploon, who had been much troubled of late, brightened, and nodded his round head emphatically.

"That's what I say," he declared.

"The decision does not lay in your hands, Doctor Boyd," drawled a nasal voice with an unconcealed sneer in it. It was clean-shaven old Joseph G. Clark, who was not disturbed, in so much as the parting of one hair, by all the adverse criticism of him which had filled column upon column of the daily press for the past few days. "The rector has never, in the history of Market Square Church, been given the control of its finances. He has invariably been hired to preach the gospel."

Sargent, Cunningham, Manning, and even Van Ploon, looked at Clark in surprise. He was not given to open reproof. Chisholm manifested no astonishment. He sat quietly in his chair, his fingers idly drumming on the edge of the table, but his mutton-chop beard was pink from the reddening of the skin beneath.

"The present rector of Market Square Church means to have a voice in its deliberations so long as he is the rector!" announced that young man emphatically, and Jim Sargent looked up at him with a jerk of his head. The Reverend Smith Boyd was pale this afternoon, but there was a something shining through his pallor which made the face alive; and the something was not temper. Rufus Manning, clasping his silvery beard with a firm grip, smiled encouragingly at the tall young orator. "I have said that I have, so far as I am concerned, relinquished the building of the cathedral," the rector went on. "For this there are two reasons. The first is that its building will bring us further away from

the very purpose for which the church was founded; the worship of God with an humble and a contrite heart! I am ready to confess that I found, on rigid self-analysis, my leading motive in urging the building of the new cathedral to have been vanity. I am also ready to confess, on behalf of my congregation and vestry, that their leading motive was vanity!"

"You have no authority to speak for me," interrupted Chisholm, his mutton-chops now red.

"Splendour is no longer the exclusive property of religion," resumed the rector, paying no attention to the interruption. "It has lost the greater part of its effectiveness because splendour has become a mere adjunct to the daily luxury of our civilisation. The new cathedral would be only a surrounding in keeping with the gilded boudoirs from which my lady parishioners step to come to worship; and the ceremony of worship has become the Sunday substitute, in point of social recognition, for the week day tea. If I thought, however, that the building of that cathedral would promote the spread of the gospel in a degree commensurate with the outlay, I would still be opposed to the erection of the building; for the money does not belong to us!"

"Go right on and develop our conscience," approved Manning, smiling up at the old walnut-beamed ceiling with its carved cherub brackets.

"The money belongs to Vedder Court," declared the rector; "to the distorted moral cripples which Market Square Church, through the accident of commerce, has taken under her wing. Gentlemen, in the recent revelations concerning the vast industrial interests of the world, I have seen the whole blackness of modern corporate methods; and Market Square Church is a corporation! Corporations were originally formed for

the purpose of expediting commerce, and it is the mere logic of opportunity that their progress to rapacity, coercion, and merciless strangulation of all competition, has been so swift. They have at no time been swayed by any moral consideration. This fact is so notorious that it has given rise to the true phrase ‘corporations have no souls.’ I wish to ask you, in how far the Market Square Church has been swayed, in its commercial dealings, by moral considerations?”

He paused, and glanced from man to man of his vestry. Sargent and Manning, the former of whom knew his plans and the latter of whom had been waiting for them to mature, smiled at him in perfect accord. Nicholas Van Ploon sat quite placidly, with his hands folded over his creaseless vest. Willis Cunningham, stroking his sparse brown Vandyke, looked uncomfortable, as if he had suddenly been introduced into a rude brawl; but his eye roved occasionally to Nicholas Van Ploon, who was two generations ahead of him in the acquisition of wealth, by the brilliant process of allowing property to increase in valuation. Chisholm glared.

“You’ll not find any money which is not tainted,” snapped Joseph G. Clark, who regarded money in a strictly impersonal light. “The very dollar you have in your pocket may have come direct from a brothel.”

“Or from Vedder Court,” retorted the rector. “We have brothels there, though we do not ‘officially’ know it. We have saloons there; we have gambling rooms there; and, from all these iniquities, Market Square Church reaps a profit! For the glory of God? I dare you, Joseph G. Clark, or W. T. Chisholm, to answer me that question in the affirmative! In Vedder Court there are tenements walled and partitioned with contagion,

poison, with miasmatic air, reeking with disease; and from the poor who flock into this fetid shelter, because we offer them cheap rents, Market Square Church takes a profit as great as any distillery combine! For the glory of God? Out of very shame we can not answer that question! We have bought and sold with the greed of any conscienceless individual, and our commodity has been filth and degradation, human lives and stunted souls! No decent man would conduct the business we do, for the reason that it would soil his soul as a gentleman; and it is a shameful thing that a gentleman should have finer ethics than a Christian church! In the beginning, I was a coward about this matter! It was because I wished to be rid of our responsibility in Vedder Court that I first urged the conversion of that property into a cathedral. We can not rid ourselves of the responsibility of Vedder Court! If it were possible for a church to be sent to hell, Market Square Church would be eternally damned if it took this added guilt upon it!"

"This talk is absurd," declared Chisholm. "The city has taken Vedder Court away from us."

"Only the property," quickly corrected Rufus Manning, turning to Chisholm with sharpness in his deep blue eyes. "If you will remember, I told you this same thing before Doctor Boyd came to us. I have waited ever since his arrival for him to develop to this point, and I wish to announce myself as solidly supporting his views."

"Your own will not bear inspection!" charged Clark, turning to Manning with a scowl.

"I'll range up at the judgment seat with you!" flamed Manning. "We're both old enough to think about that!"

Joseph G. Clark jumped to his feet, and, leaning across the table, shook a thin forefinger at Manning.

"I have been attacked enough on the point of my moral standing!" he declared, his high pitched nasal voice quavering with an anger he had held below the explosive point during the most of his life. "I can stand the attacks of a sensational press, but when spiteful criticism follows me into my own vestry, almost in the sacred shadow of the altar itself, I am compelled to protest! I wish to state to this vestry, once and for all, that my moral status is above reproach, and that my conduct has been such as to receive the commendation of my Maker! Because it has pleased Divine Providence to place in my hands the distribution of the grain of the fields, I am constantly subject to the attacks of envy and malice! It has gone so far that I, last night, received from the Reverend Smith Boyd, a request to resign from this vestry!" He paused in triumph on that, as if he had made against the Reverend Smith Boyd a charge of such ghastly infamy that the young rector must shrivel before his eyes. "I have led a blameless life! I have never smoked nor drank! I have paid every penny I ever owed and fulfilled every promise I ever made. I have obeyed the gospel, and partaken of the sacraments, and the Divine Being has rewarded me abundantly! He has chosen me, because of my faithful stewardship, to gather the foods of earth from its sources, and feed it to the mouths of the hungry; and I shall not depart from my stewardship in this church, because I am here, as I am everywhere, by the will of God!"

Perhaps W. T. Chisholm was not shocked by this blasphemy, but the dismay of it sat on every other face,

even on that of Nicholas Van Ploon, who was compelled to dig deep to find his ethics.

“You infernal old thief!” wondered Manning, recovering from his amazement. “Was it Divine Providence which directed you to devise the scheme whereby the railroads paid you two dollars rebate on every car of wheat you shipped, and a dollar bonus on every car of wheat your competitors shipped? I could give you a string of sins as long as the catechism, and you dare not deny one of them, because I can prove them on you! And yet you have the effrontery to say that a Divine Providence would establish you in your monopoly, by such scoundrelly means as you have risen to become the greatest dispenser of self advertising charities in the world! You propose to ride into Heaven on your universities and your libraries, and on the fact that you never smoked nor drank nor swore nor gambled; but when you come face to face with this horrible new god you have created, a deity who would permit you to attain wealth by the vile methods you have used, you will find him with a pitch-fork in his hands! I am glad that Doctor Boyd, though knowing your vindictive record, has had bravery enough to demand your resignation from this vestry! I hope he receives it!”

Joseph G. Clark had remained standing, and his head shook, as with a palsy, while he listened to the charge of Manning. He was a very old man, and it had been quite necessary for him to restrain his passions throughout his life.

“You will go first!” he shouted at Manning. “I am impregnable; but you have no business on this vestry! You can be removed at any time an examination

is ordered, for I have heard you, we have all heard you, deny the immaculate conception, and thereby the Divinity of Christ, in whom alone there is salvation!"

A hush like death fell on the vestry. The Reverend Smith Boyd was the first to break the ghastly silence.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I do not think that we are in a mood to-day for further discussion. I suggest that we adjourn."

His voice seemed to distract the attention of Clark from Manning, at whom he had been glowering. He turned on the Reverend Smith Boyd the remainder of the wrath which marked his first break into senility.

"As for you!" he snarled, "you will keep your fingers out of matters which do not concern you! You were hired to preach the gospel, and you will confine your attention to that occupation, preaching just what you find sanctioned in this book; nothing more, nothing less!" and taking a small volume which lay on the table, he tossed it in front of the Reverend Smith Boyd.

It was the Book of Common Prayer, containing, in the last pages, the Articles of Faith.

Clark seized his hat and coat, and strode out of the door, followed by the red-faced Chisholm, who had also been asked to resign. Nicholas Van Ploon rose, and shook hands with the Reverend Smith Boyd.

"Sargent has told me about your plan for the new tenements," he stated. "I am in favour of buying the property."

"We'll swing it for you, Boyd," promised Jim Sargent. "I've been talking with some of the other members, and they seem to favour the idea that the new Vedder Court will be a great monument. There'll be no such magnificent charity in the world, and no such impressive sacrifice as giving up that cathedral! I

think Cunningham will be with us, when it comes to a vote."

"Certainly," interposed Nicholas Van Ploon. "We don't need to make any profit from those tenements. The normal increase in ground value will be enough."

"Yes," said Cunningham slowly. "I am heartily in favour of the proposition."

"Coming along, Doctor," invited Manning, going for his coat and hat.

"No, I think not," decided the Reverend Smith Boyd quietly.

He was sitting at the end of the table facing the Good Shepherd, at the edge of whose robe still sparkled crystalline light, and in his two hands he thoughtfully held the Book of Common Prayer.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HAND IN HAND

THE Reverend Smith Boyd walked slowly out into the dim church, with the little volume in his hand. The afternoon sun had sunk so low that the illumination from the stained glass windows was cut off by the near buildings, and the patches of ruby and of sapphire, of emerald and of topaz, glowed now near the tops of the slender columns, or mellowed the dusky spaces up amid the arches.

It was hushed and silent there, deserted, and far from the thoughts of men. The young rector walked slowly up the aisle to a pew in the corner near the main entrance, and sat down, still with the little Book of Common Prayer in his hand, and, in the book, the Articles of Religion. From them alone must he preach; nothing more and nothing less. That was the duty for which he was hired. His own mind, his own intelligence, the reason and the spirit and the soul which God had given him were for no other use than the clever support of the things which were printed here. And who had formulated these articles? Men; men like himself. They had made their interpretation in solemn conclave, and had defined the Deity, and the form in which he must be addressed, as one instructs a servant in the proper words to use in announcing the arrival of a guest or the readiness of a dinner. The interpretation made, these men had arrogantly closed

the book, and had said, in effect, this is the way of salvation, and none other can avail. Unless a man believes what is here set down, he can in nowise enter the Kingdom of Heaven; and a pure life filled with good works is for naught.

The Reverend Smith Boyd had no need to read those Articles of Religion. He had been over them countless times, and he knew them by heart, from beginning to end. He had opened wide the credulity of his mind, and had forced his belief into these channels, so that he might preach the gospel, not of Christ, but of his church, with a clean conscience. And he had done so. Whatever doubts there had lurked in him, from that one period of infidelity in his youth, he had shut off behind a solid wall over which he would not peer. There were many things behind that wall which it were better for him not to see, he had told himself, lest, from among them, some false doctrine may creep up and poison the purity of his faith. He had thrown himself solidly on faith. Belief implicit and unfaltering was necessary to the support of the dogmatic theology he taught, and he gave it that belief; implicit and unfaltering. Reason had no part in religion or in theology; and for good cause!

But here had come a condition where reason, like a long suppressed passion of the body, clamoured insistently to be heard, and would have its voice, and strode in, and took loud possession. Joseph G. Clark, so filled with iniquity that he could not see his own sins, so rotted, to the depths of his soul, that he could twist every violation of moral law into a virtue, so sunken in the foulness of every possible onslaught upon mercy and justice and humanity that millions suffered from his deeds, this man could sit in the vestry of Market

Square Church, and control the destinies of an organisation built ostensibly for the purpose of saving souls and spreading the gospel of mercy and justice and humanity, could sit in the seat of the holy, because, with his lips he could say: "I acknowledge Christ as my Redeemer"! Rufus Manning, whose life was an open page, whose record was one upon which there was no blot, who had lived purely, and humanely, and mercifully and compassionately, who had given freely of his time and of his goods for the benefit of those who were weak and helpless and needy, who had read deeply into human hearts, and had comforted them because he was gifted with a portion of that divine compassion which sent an only begotten Son to die upon the cross, that through his blood the sins of man might be washed away, this man could be driven from the vestry of Market Square Church, itself guilty and stained with sin, because he could not, or would not say with his lips, "I acknowledge Christ as my Redeemer"!

Reason made a terrific onslaught against faith at this juncture. Familiar as he was with the book, the Reverend Smith Boyd turned to the Articles of Religion.

"We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deserving. . . .

"Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, for as much as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or deserve grace of congruity: yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."

There was some discrepancy here between the works

and the faith of Clark and the works and the faith of Manning. The Reverend Smith Boyd made no doubt that the Great Judge would find little difficulty in distinguishing between these two men, and in deciding upon their respective merits; but that was not the point which disturbed the young rector. It was the attitude of the church towards these men, and the fact that he must uphold that attitude. It was absurd! The Reverend Smith Boyd was a devout and earnest and consistent believer, not merely in the existence of God, but in his greatness and his power and his glory, his justice and his mercy and his wisdom; but the Reverend Smith Boyd suddenly made the startling discovery that he was not preaching God! He was preaching the church and its creed!

Started, now, he went through the thirty-nine Articles of Religion, one by one, slowly, thoughtfully, and with a quickened conscience. Reason knocked at the door of Faith, and entered; but it did not drive out Faith. They sat side by side, but each gave something to the other. No, rather, Reason stripped the mask from Faith, tore away the disguising cloak, and displayed her in all her simple beauty, sweet, and gentle, and helpful. What was the faith he had been called upon to teach? Faith in the thirty-nine Articles of Religion! This had been cleverly substituted by the organisers of an easy profession, for faith in God, which latter was too simple of comprehension for the purposes of any organisation.

For a long time the Reverend Smith Boyd sat in the corner pew, and when he had closed the book, all that had been behind the wall of his mind came out, and was sorted into heaps, and the bad discarded and the good retained. He found a wonderful relief in that. He

had lived with a secret chamber in his heart, hidden even from himself, and now that he had opened the door, he felt free. Above him, around him, within him, was the presence of God, infinite, tender, easy of understanding; and from that God, his God, the one which should walk with him through life his friend and comforter and counsellor, he stripped every shred of pretence and worthless form and useless ceremony!

"I believe in God the Creator; the Maker of my conscience; my Friend and Father." The creed of Gail!

He walked out into the broad centre aisle, now, amid the solemn pews and the avenue of slender columns, and beneath graceful arches which pointed heavenward the aspirations of the human soul. Before the altar he paused and gazed up at the beautiful Henri Dupres crucifix. The soft light from one of the clerestory windows flooded in on Him, and the compassionate eyes of the Son of God seemed bent upon the young rector in benign sympathy. For a moment the rector stood, tall and erect, then he stretched forth his arms:

"I know that my Redeemer liveth!" he said, and sank to his knees.

Two high points he had kept in his faith, points never to be shaken; the existence of his Creator, his mercy and his love, and the Divinity of his Son, who died, was crucified and buried, and on the third day arose to ascend unto Heaven. Reason could not destroy that citadel in a man born to the necessity of Faith! Man must believe some one thing. If it was as easy, as he had once set forth, to believe in the biblical account of the creation of the world as to believe in a pre-existent chaos, out of which evolved the spirit

of life, and all its marvels of growing trees and flying birds and reasoning men, it was as easy to go one step further, and add the Son to the Father and to the Holy Ghost! Even chaos must have been created!

Fully satisfied, the Reverend Smith Boyd walked into the vestry, and wrote his resignation from the rectorship of Market Square Church, for he could no longer teach, and preach, Faith—in the thirty-nine Articles of Religion! Within his grasp he had held a position of wealth, of power, of fame! He scarcely considered their loss; and in the ease with which he relinquished them, he knew that he was self-absolved from the charge of using his conscience as a ladder of ambition! If personal vanity had entered into his desire to build the new cathedral, it had been incidental, not fundamental. It made him profoundly happy to know this with positiveness.

He called up the house of Jim Sargent, and asked for Gail.

"Come over," he invited her. "I want to see you very much. I'm in the church. Come in through the vestry."

"All right," was the cheerful reply. "I'll be there in a minute."

He had been very sly! He was tremendously pleased with himself! He had kept out of his voice all the longing, and all the exultation, and all the love! He would not trust even one vibration of his secret to a cold telephone wire!

He set the door of the vestry open wide. Within the church, the organist had conquered that baffling run in the mighty prelude of Bach, and the great dim spaces up amid the arches were pulsing in ecstasy with the tremendous harmony. Outside, upon the back-

ground of the celestial strain, there rose a fluttering, a twittering, a cooing. The doves of spring had returned to the vestry yard.

Just a moment and Gail appeared, poised in the doorway, with a filmy pink scarf about her shoulders, a simple frock of delicate grey upon her slender figure, her brown hair waving about her oval face, a faint flush upon her cheeks, her brown eyes sparkling, her red lips smiling up at him.

He had intended to tell her much, but instead, he folded her in his arms, and she nestled there, content. For a long, happy moment they stood, lost to the world of thought; and then she looked up at him, and laughed.

"I knew it from your voice," she said.

He laughed with her; then he grew grave, but there was the light of a great happiness in his gravity.

"I have resigned," he told her.

That was a part of what she had known.

"And not for me!" she exulted. It was not a question. She saw that in him was no doubt, no quandary, no struggle between faith and disbelief.

"I see my way clearly," he smiled down at her; "and there are no thorns to cut for me. I shall never change."

"And we shall walk hand in hand about the greatest work in the world," she softly reminded him, and there were tears in her eyes. "But what work shall that be, Tod?" She looked up at him for guidance, now.

"To shed into other lives some of the beauty which blossoms in our own," he replied, walking with her into the great dim nave, where the shadows still quivered with the under-echoes of the mighty Bach prelude. "I have been thinking much of the many things you have

said to me," he told her, "and particularly of the need, not for a new religion, but for a re-birth of the old; that same new impulse towards the better and the higher life which Christ brought into the world. I have been thinking on the mission of Him, and it was the very mission to the need of which you have held so firmly. He came to clear away the thorns of creed which had grown up between the human heart and God! The brambles have grown again. The time is almost ripe, Gail, for a new quickening of the spirit; for the Second Coming."

She glanced at him, startled.

"For a new voice in the wilderness," she wondered.

"Not yet," he answered. "We have signs in the hearts of men, for there is a great awakening of the public conscience throughout the world; but before the day of harvest arrives, we must have a sign in the sky. No great spiritual revival has ever swept the world without its attendant supernatural phenomena, for mysticism is a part of religion, and will be to the end of time. Reason, by the very nature of itself, realises its own limitations, and demands something beyond its understanding upon which to hang its faith. It is the need of faith which distinguishes the soul from the mind."

"A sign," mused Gail, her eyes aglow with the majesty of the thought.

"It will come," he assured her, with the calm pre-science of prophecy itself. "As no great spiritual revival has ever swept the world without its attendant supernatural phenomena, so no great spiritual revival has ever swept the world without its concentered symbol which men might wear upon their breasts. The cross! What shall be its successor? A ball of fire in the sky?"

Who knows! If that symbol of man's spiritual rejuvenation, of his renewed nearness to God, were, in reality, a ball of fire, Gail, I would hold it up in the sight of all mankind though it shrivelled my arm!"

The thin treble note stole out of the organ loft, pulsing its timid way among the high, dim arches, as if seeking a lodgment where it might fasten its tiny thread of harmony, and grow into a song of new glory, the glory which had been born that day in the two earnest hearts beneath in the avenue of slender columns. The soft light from one of the clerestory windows flooded in on the compassionate Son of Man above the altar. The very air seemed to vibrate with the new inspiration which had been voiced in the old Market Square Church. Gail gazed up at Smith Boyd, with the first content her heart had ever known; content in which there was both earnestness and serenity, to replace all her groping. He met her gaze with eyes in which there glowed the endless love which it is beyond the power of speech to tell. There was a moment of ecstasy, of complete understanding, of the perfect unity which should last throughout their lives. In that harmony, they walked from the canopy of dim arches, out through the vestry, and beneath the door above which perched the two grey doves, cooing. For an instant Gail looked back into the solemn depths, and a wistfulness came into her eyes.

"The ball of fire," she mused. "When shall we see it in the sky?"



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